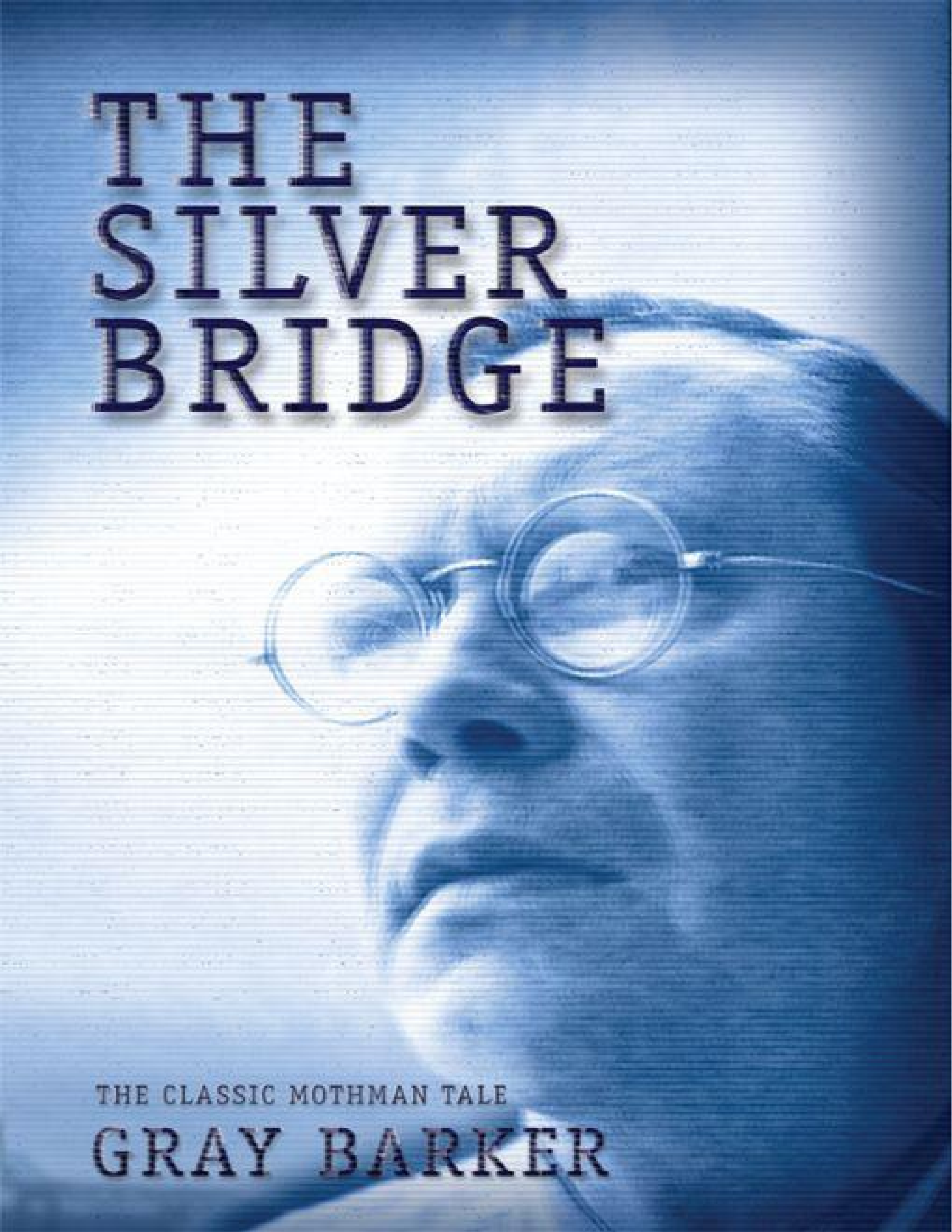
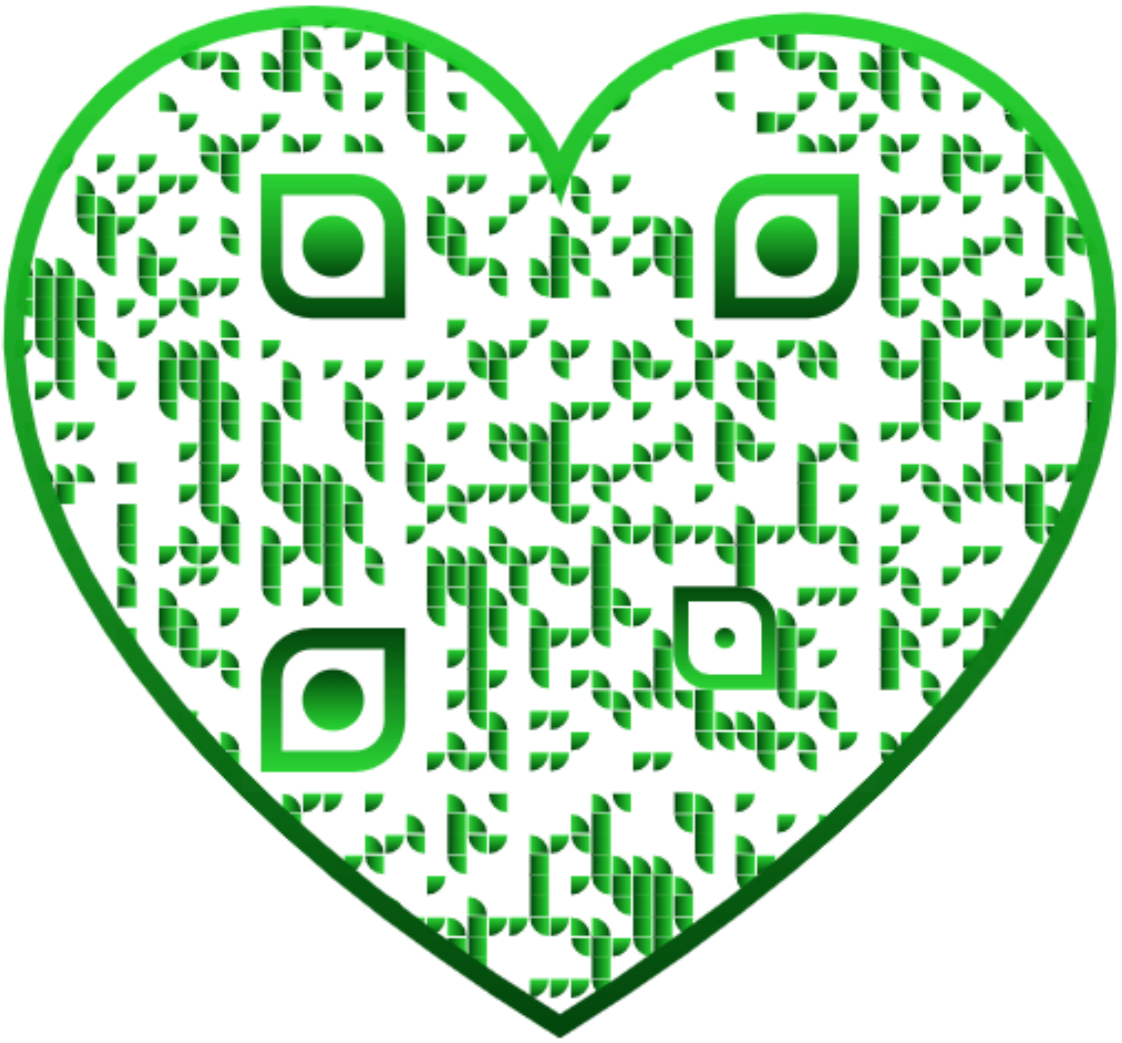
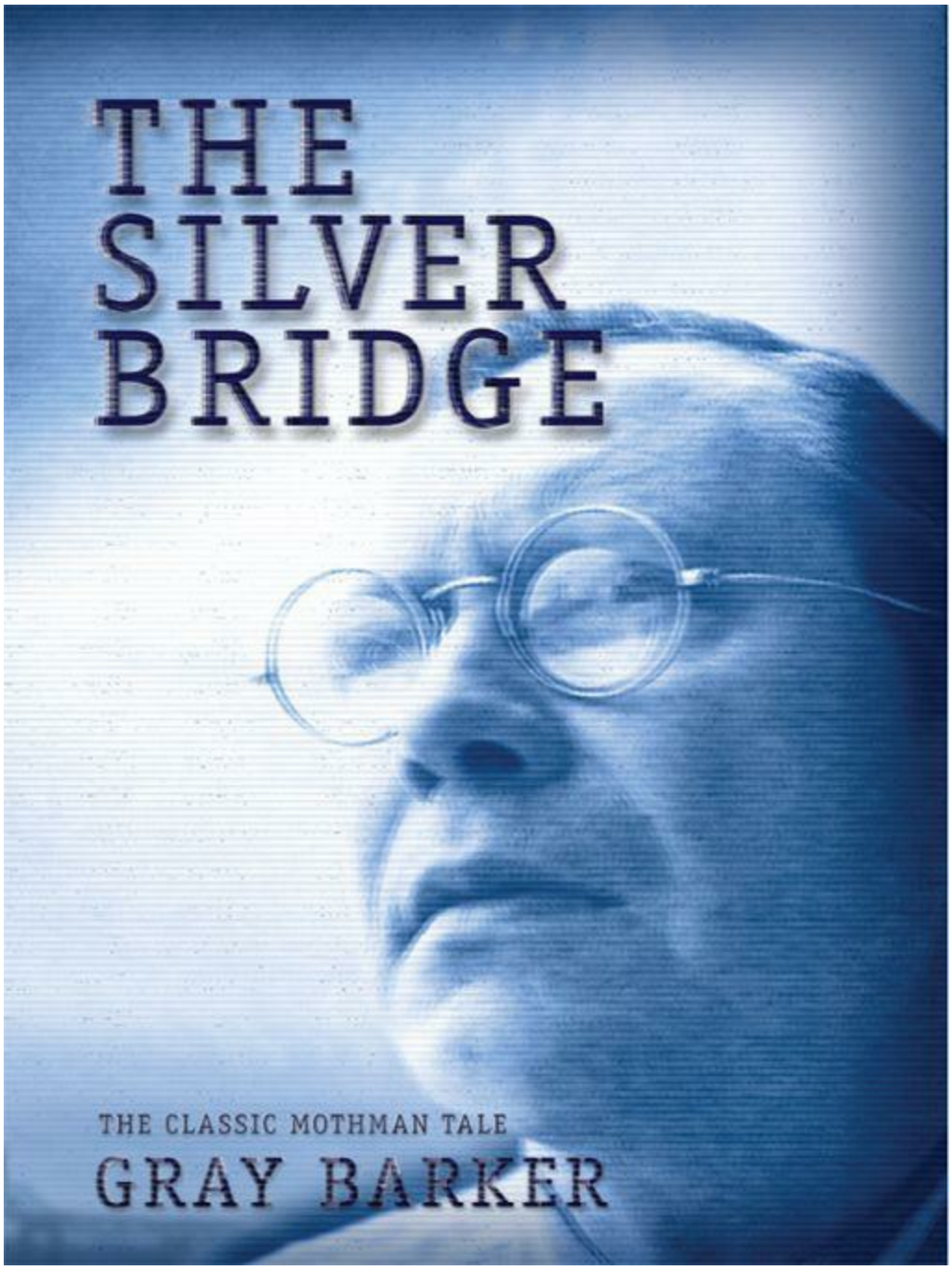
THE SILVER BRIDGE



THE CLASSIC MOTHMAN TALE

GRAY BARKER




THE
SILVER
BRIDGE
THE CLASSIC MOTHMAN TALE
GRAY BARKER

FOREWORD TO THE 2008 EDITION

I came across Gray Barker's Silver Bridge during a flurry of synchronicities in the early 1990s that also caused me to read John Keel's book The Mothman Prophecies: An Investigation Into the Mysterious American Visits of the Infamous Feathery Garuda. I waited many weeks for one of the few remaining copies of Silver Bridge to be delivered to my local library. I was intensely interested in Gray's take because I was one of those original witnesses Keel and Barker were going around trying to interview in the late 1960s. I happened to grow up in Mound, WV (now N. Charleston), and was 7 years old when the Birdman - later called "Mothman" - was first spotted. While Mothman became famous for his visits to Pt. Pleasant, he also buzzed Charleston's State Capitol dome, Sunrise Museum, and Union Carbide plant - where I glimpsed him. Later, in 1973, I saw what seemed to be a shadowy echo of Mothman emerge from a tree. The location was right where one of my best friends had seen a vision - in 1967 - about an attack on NYC in 2001 that would "start WWIII." According to my friend, the Birdman had suggested we build a shrine and stand in a certain spot in order to "see the future." I was dubious, of course, but my friend soon proved his case by daring me to stand in a spot near his front door. When I accepted the dare, I indeed saw brief, flickering images of the same vision. As one might expect, I was shocked and horrified. My pal later moved away, but I never forgot the incident.

As a witness, I was chilled to the bone when I read Keel's weird, scary Mothman tale, for I then knew that the memories I had of odd childhood events were accurate. However The Silver Bridge was just as chilling for me, because Barker often utilized the point of view of a young boy, longing to know Mothman. And that was me! Even today, The Silver Bridge takes me back to my experiences in a very real way. Ironically, the chapters many consider to be hokey or contrived - like where Barker asks us to see things from Mothman's point of view - are the ones that affect me the most. In many ways, I am still that "Mothboy," searching for hope, dreaming of flying. Gray's understanding of the inner states of witnesses was uncanny. It's as if Barker came into contact with this phenomenon himself He knew. He understood its human quotient. Many researchers toil for decades without realizing that our collective

unconscious may be involved. Barker grasped this possibility instantly, and expounded upon it in an elegant, nuanced way.

While it is true that Keel, myself, and others sense that "Mothman" may actually be the Garuda, an archetypal, crime-fighting birdman sending psychic messages to humans in order to stop global catastrophe, that doesn't paint the whole picture. The birdman also sends us key, intimate messages about our personal lives. It is within this private realm that Gray, ever human and caring, timelessly shines.

Andy Colvin

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2008 EDITION

I first met Gray Barker at the 2nd National UFO Conference in Cleveland, Ohio in 1965. The year before, at the first meeting of that long-running annual event (which I co-founded with Rick Hilberg and the late Al Manak), Jim Moseley had said, "We've got to get Gray to come to one of these things." Gray was indeed an honored guest from then on, and it was to Jim Moseley that the first "Gray Barker Lifetime Achievement in Ufology Award" was eventually given, in Atlanta in 1995.

By then Gray had long passed from these shores, leaving us with an extraordinary legacy of wild rumor, exotic folklore, poetic license, and mysterious fact - puzzle pieces of what was (and still is) ufology.

Gray got his one and only best-selling book early in his career, after being a member of the first UFO club, Albert K. Bender's "International Flying Saucer Bureau." Gray was starting his own long-running Saucerian Bulletin and publishing house (Saucerian Publications) when Bender was mysteriously forced out of ufology - he said - by three men in dark clothing, supposedly government agents. Eventually, the story morphed into these visitors being "ufonauts." We now know, of course, that in 1952 the CIA had recommended that a certain amount of mischief be introduced into private UFO societies following the wave of UFOs over Washington, D.C., which had compromised national security (or so it was said at the time). The story might have died with a very frightened and silenced Bender were it not for Gray's explosive and entertaining book about the Bender case, They Knew Too Much About the Flying Saucers.

Of course, the Men in Black did not start with Bender, or Barker. As early as 1947, Seattle's famous Maury Island case involved such mysterious visitors, and the "Man in Black" repeatedly shows up in medieval occult lore - often, as the devil himself! But Barker's exposition of the Men in Black put them on the ufology radar and into popular imagination, where they have remained to the present day.

Gray Barker was born in Rifle, Virginia, in 1925, but is best known for his

many years in Clarksburg, West Virginia, where he became the first investigator on the scene of the famous Flatwoods Monster and Mothman cases. A college graduate majoring in English, Barker had a flare for extracting the folklore from UFO lore, and the UFO lore from the rich folkloric tradition indigenous to the Appalachian Mountains. Being a local film distributor for many years, he also had an intimate knowledge of the people of Appalachia who, because of their long-standing need to survive in the face of incredible hardships, tend to exhibit an unusual mix of sarcasm, superstition, honesty, dry (and often black) humor, practicality, naivete, and dramatic theatricality. In essence, they can be yarn spinners and straight-shooters rolled into one. Gray incorporated all of these tendencies into his work, often causing it to be misunderstood by both supporters and detractors from "the big city."

I met Gray in his "middle period" after Flatwoods and Bender, but before the Mothman scare that led to the volume presently under consideration. One time we were having a dinner meeting in an Atlanta restaurant, with Moseley and local fans. Someone brought up the question of "what Barker really believes." I looked at Gray, slyly.

"I think I know." I said, smiling. "On one level, Gray is the staunchest believer in some of the most bizarre stuff in ufology. He is the "Champion of The Weird." "But," I continued, "that isn't the real story. Under that is Gray the cynic, who believes none of it - who is yarn-spinning merrily away." Gray was poker-faced, but obviously interested… "However, we're still not there," I said, looking him square in the eyes, "because way down deep, Gray Barker believes all of it: the Men in Black, the space people, the saucers, the monsters - all of it."

Gray was amused, I think, but he remained poker-faced. "I believe," he said, after a long pause, "in everything, and nothing."

I see no need to dwell on the Moseley-Barker "merry trickster" phase, where the two had minor fun with overly serious researchers. Suffice to say, one can pretend to be a UFO investigator - in a lab coat behind a glass wall or computer keyboard - or one can roll up one's sleeves, get one's hands dirty, and become a living, breathing part of the mythos. Gray chose the latter course, as the chapter "The Recorder" intimates.

The John Keel book, The Mothman Prophecies, is a reporter's look at the events in West Virginia in the late 1960s, by a rather offbeat reporter. The volume you hold in your hands, The Silver Bridge, is another story altogether. Shortly after the famous West Virginia Mothman cases and the tragic collapse of the Silver Bridge, Gray sent me a curious manuscript. He must have considered me to be one of the "deep thinkers" in ufology… Immediately, I could see that it was not written in Keel's style - not even vaguely. It was, like all of Gray's books, a form of docudrama, on the border between real events and the mythos generated by those events. It was one amazing book. I read it and reread it. "Wow," I thought, "this is it! The real thing…" I proofread it for Gray and wrote the original introduction, which was nowhere equal to the book itself. The Silver Bridge brought hardly a ripple in 1970, although it has since become well known and highly collectible, due its rarity and - at a deeper level - its incisive look at the psychological underpinnings of paranormal phenomena.

In a sense, this strange and exceptional volume is closer to the emotional mood and gothic imagery of the The Mothman Prophecies film than even the Keel book of the same name. Barker deftly captures the numinosity and sheer weirdness of those dreamlike events, examining what it must have been like to grow up in mist-shrouded hills where good and evil struggle for men's hearts and minds - and where so many things are "off-limits" to the ordinary. One gets a strong dose of conspiracy and grassroots folklore, laced with the sexual undertones of firebrand preachers painting verbal images of Hell designed to haunt their parishioners in an eerily erotic way. Gray saw these paradoxes in the whole Mothman cycle, and told me so. A careful reading of The Silver Bridge reveals a respect for the power of the psyche, and hints at an essentially human key to the UFO mystery.

In the end, one must have both the objective, skeptical accounts of a Keel and the subjective ruminations of a Gray Barker to fully appreciate what Mothman represents, and to see where the entire convoluted web of "ufology" leads.

You are at the threshold of The Matrix. To get beyond this introduction, you need to decide on the red pill or the green pill, and get ready to descend down the rabbit hole into the "real" world. Have an enlightening voyage… Or, put the book down and go back to sleep.

Allen H. Greenfield
April 11, 2008

THE SILVER BRIDGE

A REMEMBRANCE OF GRAY - by Jim Moseley, 2002

The people-and-persons side of ufology is much more entertaining - and maybe even more important - than UFOs themselves. Those drawn to saucers - believers and skeptics alike - have always been a remarkable bunch of characters. Many are highly credulous, easy targets for practical jokes and tales of conspiracy, cover-up, and assorted weirdness. For better or worse, both Gray Barker and I quite happily took advantage of this, frequently as partners in crime. I leave it to others to ponder the whys behind our actions. Whatever the psychology involved, we truly enjoyed ourselves. My devilish adventures with Gray were some of the best times of my life. Gray was my good friend from the time we met in early 1954 until his untimely death in 1984 at the age of 59. He was a complex, private person, and I'm quite sure I knew him better than anyone else during his adult years. He should have lived forever, but he didn't. I still miss him.

Gray was reviled, laughed at, or ignored with difficulty by most Serious Ufologists but genuinely revered by hosts of Believers. With his Saucerian Bulletin, Gray set a never-since-equaled (even by me) standard for ufological reporting - that is, the spinning of brilliant saucer yarns in good, entertaining English that excited and titillated the reader. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, he got a real kick out of saucers, compiling many "contactee" books - and some even more far-out than that - under his Saucerian Press and New Age Books imprints. He also wrote about a dozen very humorous monographs, of which, as far as I know, I have the only existing copies. Like the so-called MJ-12 documents, some of these were "one copy only" productions, while others were distributed only to a tiny inner circle of friends. All offer wry and cutting commentary on ufology and life in general. They were marvelously written but, it seems, too pointed and unconventional for even such an iconoclast as Gray to publish more widely.

As for Gray's general attitude toward UFOs, I do understand it, yet it is hard to explain. He thought of the paranormal as he did motion pictures: as make-believe, wonderment, entertainment, fantasy, and fun and games. Yet, when I tried to pin him down, as I often did, asking if he didn't think at least some of the phenomena might be real, he would say that if there was anything to it, it

was psychic, extradimensional, or esoteric - but definitely not interplanetary. West Virginia's Mothman seems to have inhabited this same extradimensional space. The Mothman is a strange being that John Keel immortalized in his Mothman Prophecies in 1975 - a full 5 years after the groundbreaking Silver Bridge. With it, Keel established himself - alongside Barker - as one of the leading lights of four-dimensional saucering. It was Keel who would coin the term MIB, for the notorious "Men in Black" invented by Gray. With Gray Barker's passing, the door fully closed on the "classic" era of saucering. There's not much more to say, except perhaps to share this poem that I penned a year after Gray's death:

Back to You, Gray Barker

I tried to phone Gray Barker tonight
Like we used to do.
I dialed the 304 area code
(So close to 305, in Florida);
And the robot said,
"You can't dial him where he is now
The lions don't go out that far."
And I sassed the robot, saying,
"How far out do the li-ons go?"
And it replied, mockingly,
"Thank you for using AT&T."

I tried to write Gray Barker the other day
Like we used to do.
I put on a "D" stamp
(Was there ever a. "C"?)
And the letter came back to me,
Together with a warning
Stamped on the envelope:
"For Domestic Use Only."
A man from the Post Office Department came by
And informed me
That R. E. Straith is dead.

I tried to reach Gray Barker the other night,
Telepathically, as if in a dream;
And I saw this circle of Beings
Clustered around a smoldering cauldron.
Here was Palmer and Arnold and Jessup and Wilkins;
And Layne and Edwards and Scully and Van Tassel;
All their differences forgotten;
And George Adamski, with his telescope;
And here too was Gray Barker With a drink in his hand,

Stirring the cauldron so vigorously That his hand shook;
So I asked him, “When may I join you?”
And George Adamski answered, for the group:
“Time Will Tell.”

SAUCERIAN BOOKS Clarksburg, West Virginia

FIRST EDITION
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METADISC BOOKS Seattle, Washington

To The Bird Creature

“When a thing is hidden away
with so much pains, merely to
reveal it is to destroy it.”
—Tertullian

AN INTRODUCTION

"…We hope Dr. Condon will not mind, if, in our enthusiasm in making the point that the saucers are real, we involved him in a few imaginary situations, exercising a great deal of literary license to make our point…"

Gray Barker
in Saucer News

We are dealing here, perhaps, in this book, in this work, not with prose alone but with poetry as well. If so, it might be well not to judge it in the terms that one might employ in the assessment of conventional non-fiction—scientific non-fiction at that—but rather judge it in terms appropriate to its particular nature…possibly a hybrid that is—strictly speaking—neither poetry nor prose, but something of both.

I suspect that Gray Barker, the author of this work, in the format of a "conventional" book dealing with strange phenomena has in fact written—how intentionally I do not know—something else again.

We have here literal details, literal facts, which presumably to one extent or another could be checked for accuracy for their individual and/or collective merit. The results of such a study could be compared with Mr. Barker's descriptions, the degree of consistency being used as the standard for judging the book.

One could, presumably, do this, but I have serious doubt as to whether this would present the appropriate evaluation of the true worth or meaning of the book. It might well be akin to questioning the value of the fable of the fox and the crow on the ground that it is "unrealistic".

There may well be a "physical cause" for the strange phenomena with

which Mr. Barker deals. But strangeness itself, and the reaction of mankind to it, may have an importance.

When a man takes pen in hand and documents an event or series of events in a factual "one-two-three" form, it is one thing. But, read these lines from chapter 5:

"…On the outside there raged fires of even greater dimensions, and within them terror, for they were furnaces of Hell—as beings struggled madly with each other in unconscionable and inexplicable acts of physical and mental violence. Oftimes his physical forges raged and burned to contribute to that diabolic outside scene.

"Today, however, he had rebelled at those things he loathed, and forged a golden ball for the children in the world."

Whether this event happened literally—and happened in the way it is here described, I do not know. But in terms of this work, is this the essence of the matter?

Of the literal details, some comment can be made. Chapter 12 deals with the so-called "Men in Black", a subject Mr. Barker has dealt with before, notably in a previous book, They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers. I, myself, don't "buy" the "men in black" stories, but neither do I consider this to be something to be placed in a back file, stamped "solved" in big red letters. The concept of such individuals is somewhat fantastic, but this doesn't mean that there aren't unsolved cases, and it might be well to observe that what seems "fantastic" is not necessarily "fantasy". There may well be something to the "men in black". Indeed, perhaps a great deal.

Aesthetically speaking, I consider this work to be quite pleasing. But aesthetics and literal detail may not be all that is available to the reader.

I do not know quite what we have—in this book. I wonder if the author, himself, knows what he had done. It may well be nothing, or it may be that…

Perhaps Gray Barker has done, subconsciously, what Mr. Universe did, and forged a golden ball for the children of the world.

Allen H. Greenfield
January 1, 1970

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AFTERWORD

THE SETTING

In Point Pleasant, W. Va., Mrs. Ralph Thomas opened the ancient family bible, and with shaking finger delineated the passages she knew so well. Then with a shudder she turned the ponderous volume to the steel engravings that depicted the diabolic realm of the wicked, as they burned forever for their transgressions, deep in the bowels of fiery and eternal Hell.

Yes, the creature was there, or one almost like it. The evil thing, somewhat like an angel, but with wings shriveled and grown blackened, and its face a horrible mask, was indeed terrifying. But never could the picture grip her and hold her in its spell; never could it inspire that power of terror that had welled over her in the vision.

Again Mrs. Thomas prayed long and fervently; then she prophesied and spoke loudly in tongues.

And in Parkersburg, a good two hours' drive to the north, Woodrow Derenberger was also frightened. The fear that shook him was not at the memory of his strange experience, but from the realization of having told it. His fellow human beings, he thought, through prejudice, ignorance or fear, would be his persecutors.

He had seen a strange ship land and a man get out of it. The man had talked with him, though he spoke no words. Through a process which somebody described as "mental telepathy" he had apparently conversed with a being from a strange world, whose cities were called "gatherings," and where visitors were known as "searchers".

Derenberger held no fear of Indrid Cold, which the man called himself.

"I mean you no harm. I come from a country much less powerful than yours," Cold had assured him.

And in Ripley, midway between Point Pleasant and Parkersburg, Mr.

Universe forged his golden ball. He plunged it into the searing heat and drew it out again; then he tempered and retempered it. As he carefully and lovingly polished it, the noise of the forges subsided and he could hear substituted the sounds of laughter and great sport. He could almost see it glistening in the November sun as it was hurled in friendship and good will.

But in the eyes of man, it would inspire only briefly the wonder of an otherworldly origin, and he would soon test it, drill into it, and lock it in a bank vault for its lucrative value, snatching it from the children of Earth, for whom Mr. Universe had intended it.

As to the flying creature, Newell Partridge had probably seen it first; rather its eyes, one should say. The fictional protagonist in Edgar Allen Poe's classic, The Telltale Heart, might have expressed the same fear. "I think it was his eye," he explains, when he tries, maddened by the telltale beating, to explain why he murdered the old man.

The eyes glistened like bicycle reflectors from the vicinity of the abandoned barn. Partridge's German Shepherd dog, "Bandit", rushed at the eyes as he had often charged wild game. But he encountered something from the unknown.

Two young couples, Mr. and Mrs. Steve Mallette and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Scarberry, were the next to see it, and the fiery eyes would be forever implanted in their memories. The old T.N.T. plant, with its black windows, like blind eyes staring at them through the darkness, would help set the eerie, almost unnatural scene. Mothman would follow them as they fled homeward. And even after the creature itself went away, its invisible spectre would continue to haunt their lives.

It was the younger, almost boy-like image of Jesus which Mrs. Ralph Thomas fixed in her mind when she knelt and prayed—not for her personal safety, but for the evils of the world, on Nov. 16, 1966. She first thanked Him for the gift of prophecy which she felt had been bestowed upon her unworthily. Through this gift she had predicted the war in Viet Nam, had accurately foreseen what man would photograph on the moon, and had apocalyptic views of the future, of dire and cataclysmic nature.

The other image of the Christ, which hung in the small ante room, was older and more severe. Although His visage there carried the benign promise to save mankind, it also suggested an avenging power, the idea that Man, however holy, is still born in sin, and must repent of it with penance and suffering.

"Dear Jesus," she implored, "forgive us for our terrifying sins, for we are not perfect. And further, in Thy infinite mercy, forgive us for those greater and perhaps more terrible sins, those of omission, committed against God and His Holy Son!"

It had been the material world which had intruded the preceding Monday. When Mrs. Thomas finished her housework, putting the large eight-room home in neat shape, it was her custom to kneel silently in the kitchen, where, surrounded by her accoutrements of housewifely arts, she would move her lips in a prayer of thanksgiving for her many blessings. Since she could not often remember any common sin she had committed (she was known throughout the neighborhood as an almost saintly person who was the first to comfort a grief or nurse an illness), she envisioned sins that few others would admit or call to mind: the many things she had not done in the fulfillment of her daily living and the practice of her chosen faith.

That Monday she had turned on the television set to catch a noon report on the Viet Nam war. There had followed an entertaining program and she had been caught up in it. The young MC of the contest show had reminded her of a relative who had died in an accident—still in sin, though she felt that Jesus would suffer only the most wicked to burn in Hell, and that surely the young, weeping and looking heavenward as they entered those dark and awesome gates, would not be denied one last chance for repentance.

And she had not prayed for all sinners everywhere: those on drugs, those languishing in prisons, those uncorrupted children of heathen lineage who had never heard even the shortest biblical verse, "Jesus wept."

Especially, she had not prayed for those lost souls, who according to the Bible, had not one hope, being damned forever, as had the rich man who begged Lazarus for one drop of water to moisten his tongue.

"Let me, O Lord, implore you," she prayed, "to take my own precious life and soul, and place me in that fiery furnace, if but one of those lost souls there might be given a chance once more to bask in the brilliance of Thy golden light, and to experience Thy forgiving and redeeming power."

Although she couldn't understand why even the most wicked should be consigned to eternal suffering, she felt that the ways of God were mysterious and far beyond her mortal powers of understanding.

But she had forgotten on that day; she had neglected to offer this prayer. And shortly afterward the vision came over her.

Her prophecies usually came in such visions, but mostly they were less

dramatic and not as frightening. Instead it would seem that a quiet voice would speak on such occasions and tell her of events to come.

This time the vision was different. It began with black clouds billowing toward her. Out of the clouds came lightning and flame. Then the clouds parted, and a huge airplane, its jets screaming, plunged out of them into her view. It was a vast, unearthly plane, with many engines, all spouting fire and fumes. It poised high in the sky and then plunged toward her, and the noise of the jets seemed to mingle with the screams of many passengers.

Mrs. Thomas felt this was a portent of a forthcoming plane crash, such as she had experienced before the collision of two planes over the Grand Canyon some years previous.

The plane became amorphous, and changed shape. Now it was a huge, awesome bird that still plunged toward her with terrifying swiftness. Its wings flapped wildly, and the screams of the passengers changed to a wild and unearthly croaking. Its eyes, red and glaring, seemed to hold her in a hypnotic trance. They became larger and larger, with the blackness closing in around them.

"Those eyes had gripping power over you," she told her neighbors. "I feared it was going to tear me to pieces."

By Wednesday, Nov. 16, Mrs. Thomas had recovered from the initial shock of the vision, but was worried about the events which it must have portended.

Mrs. Katherine Wamsley, along with Marcella Bennett, both Point Pleasant residents, had come to visit her, and they had cheered her up. Mrs. Bennett brought her new baby, and Mrs. Thomas saw it for the first time. As soon as the mother unwrapped her, the child confirmed Mrs. Thomas's reputation with children. The baby opened her little eyes and made a gurgling noise, and tried to reach out and touch her large necklace, even though the child was only three months old.

"There, Baby, Baby, let me hold you," Mrs. Thomas offered, a warm glow permeating her as she took it from its mother. It burbled pleasantly again.

"She's been so cross lately," Mrs. Bennett told her; "you work wonders with babies."

"I like her little pink dress," Mrs. Wamsley said, "I think she's divine."

A short distance from the Thomas home the old abandoned T.N.T. plant seemed to lurk, like something vast and living, where the preceding night had been one of horror for the two young couples. Mrs. Thomas had felt that her vision had indeed been prophetic, but that instead of a plane crash she had

foreseen the advent of Mothman, the great bird which would terrorize Point Pleasant.

As the two women prepared to depart, she hoped her mind would not again begin to dwell on the subject, for the tale the young couple had told disturbed her in a peculiar way. She felt that not only had her dream been prophetic, but that the creature portended something even more horrifying and tragic. "Something will happen…something will happen," she told herself, even then, under her breath, as she walked with her friends to the door.

As she hooked the night latch she heard Mrs. Bennett scream. She re-opened the door to witness a scene of wild confusion. Mrs. Bennett had dropped her baby and was picking up up, apparently examining it for injuries. It was crying. Mrs. Wamsley pointed fearfully to the sky.

"It had a body like a man, yet it was a bird, oh a terrible bird! I think it was the devil himself!"

Both fled back into the house. The baby had been wrapped heavily and apparently suffered no injuries, but the two adults were hysterical. They slowly gasped out the story. A huge, bird-like creature, with glowing red eyes, had suddenly dropped like a heavy wet sack upon the sand of the yard. It made a flapping, gurgling sound, as it righted itself and stood up.

The red eyes had almost hypnotized them, holding their gaze for a few seconds before it suddenly shot up into the air "like a rocket".

Mrs. Thomas thought that she, herself, had caught a glimpse of the red eyes as she opened the door, but she could remember no huge bird. They had been the same red eyes of her vision.

When the excitement had died down and her neighbors had finally departed, she retired to her kitchen, carrying there the ancient bible. Again she opened it and looked upon the terrifying creatures doomed to suffer in agony and perpetual darkness and ugliness because they were out of God's Light.

Was the great bird one of them, or had it been a sign sent upon her, reminding her she had forgotten to pray?

"Oh Lord," she prayed, "forgive this poor trespasser who would let the ways of the world intrude upon her worship. Withdraw this terrible visitation and withdraw Your anger. Let not the innocent be punished for the ways of the transgressor. And Oh Lord, even though it be blasphemy, set Thy Light also on those creatures, who expelled from heaven, dwell incessantly in the shadows of the precious Light, away from Thy sweet face; and who, if but for a day, could dwell again in that Light, would perhaps repent, and descend upon the

world with warnings, even though Elijah and the prophets failed. For even though the fires torment them, and the terrible worms bite at them, it surely must be their hope that You, in Thy infinite wisdom, have not completely withdrawn from them."

Mrs. Thomas sobbed at this thought, and then a feeling of peace came over her. She knew it was time she should go to bed.

"And if it please you, dear Jesus," she added, "let no more prophecies come tonight."

She turned out the light and lay there, still experiencing the tranquil calm. She thought about the baby and how beautiful she was. She would rock her to sleep later, and tell her stories of past days in the valley. She hoped Mrs. Bennett would bring her back for visits, despite the harrowing circumstances of that evening.

It was a cold, calm night. The rain had stopped, and only intermittent clouds, sweeping rapidly across the sky, obscured, then revealed the moon. She could see one bright star. It was now past midnight. Only a occasional car interrupted the peace of the lonely T.N.T. area, and she began to hear the far-away sounds of the city.

The sounds were diffuse and indistinct, though she could distinguish the occasional auto horn. Later, when all was quiet in her neighborhood, the city noises could be identified by the steady rumbling she always heard—the sound of trailer trucks as they shook the eye bar-suspended structure, as the heavy traffic progressed, bumper-to-bumper, across the Silver Bridge.

CHAPTER 1

THE EERIE NIGHT

I always dread the drive to New Martinsville, which I make about once each month in connection with my educational sales work. From Clarksburg its route of access is a tortuous, twisting, narrow stream of macadam, pock-marked with “pot holes”, and marked here and there with warning signs, one-lane bridges and precipitous mountain views, where one slight misjudgment in steering might well throw one over a towering embankment, with no guard rails present to slow or stay the crashing descent.

On the evening of Nov. 19, 1966, as I negotiated the treacherous road at a careful speed, I wondered why the State Road Commission allowed it to remain so primitive. But the old farm houses, perched nervously on the banks above it, and unpainted for years, with occasional half-naked children standing on their porches despite the cold weather; the rusting automobiles in their yards, often with wheels and other parts removed, indicated that here was a people without any political personality or power.

The utter drabness depressed me. The old mine tipples, most of them abandoned, with timbers rotting and crumbling, contributed to my low mood. A small railroad station, no longer operative, and with yellowing timetables and notices on its doors, added to the evidence of general decay. Not only, it seemed, had the area declined economically, but psychologically and spiritually as well.

The driving rain, along with the descending early darkness of winter, further impeded my progress. Mud, hurled from the tires of a creeping coal truck impossible to pass on the crooked road, fouled my windshield and

headlights. I thought of the many remarks I hadheard about the people of the area, where it was said that intermarriage between kin was widely practiced, and that, as a result, deformities of children were commonplace. Social workers had attempted to help, but residents preferred to exist at near starvation rather than to reveal their secrets. Rumors had it that in many a locked room along the road, a "dummy" as these defective progeny were called locally, was imprisoned, to live out its days guiltily hidden from society.

I was glad to reach Wallace, the westernmost village in Harrison county; for here not only would the road improve, but the general tone of the countryside as well. Although the outward signs of degeneration would end with my crossing the boundary of Wetzel county, generally known as more progressive, a rural atmosphere still prevailed. All business places were closed except one small service station where an unkempt, deaf old man finally understood my questions, and directed me on the road that would lead to the home of Newell Partridge, whose German Shepherd dog, "Bandit" may have been snatched out of this world by Mothman.

The side road was paved, and not much worse than the main highways I had negotiated; but the rain had increased and driving was even more difficult. I hoped the old man had been correct with his directions.

I wished I had not gotten mixed up in the matter at all. A friend from the local television station had called me and given me the lead. Newell Partridge had telephoned the station two nights previous and asked them about the news item they had telecast about the Point Pleasant happenings.

"He began by asking me in particular about the report of a dog being found dead in that area," the news director told me. "Then this fellow said his dog disappeared on the same night—a large German Shepherd animal. He was pretty well shook up about the loss of his dog, and I think he half suspects that 'Mothman' got his dog."

I then telephoned Partridge, who at first was reluctant to talk. After I explained that I considered myself a reliable reporter, and was after only the facts, he assented to invite me to his house for an interview.

As the pavement ended, and a graveled road continued, gutted by mud puddles, I seriously considered turning back, for I felt I might be on the wrong road. I noted with disquiet that my gas was low, for I understood the witness lived a short distance off the main road and had neglected filling up before leaving Clarksburg.

Seeing a light to my right through the downpouring rain, I stopped the car and ran over to the building. It was a new house in its final stages of construction, yet apparently already occupied. There was no front entrance completed, but I banged on a window and somebody opened it and poked his head out. The resident assured me I was on the right track and that indeed there actually was a Newell Partridge, who lived "quite a spell" down the road.

His "quite a spell" developed as no great distance, yet it included a frightening mountain, with narrow muddy roads. The downpour worsened and I envisioned becoming stuck or running into the ditch. Since turning off the main highway I had encountered no traffic, and I probably would be stranded all night, before help could be obtained.

The depressing and disquieting condition of the road, along with the utter weirdness of the case I was investigating, made me jumpy. I tramped my brake pedal and almost skidded into the ditch to avoid an animal, limping and waddling in a kind of sidewise motion on the road ahead of me. Inching ahead, I followed it, obviously a fowl of some sort. It was too large to be a chicken; evidently it was a goose or turkey. Instead of getting off the road it continued to limp ahead of the car. Now and then it would falter, and flap desperately, before arising to continue its tortured journey. Finally the animal, apparently incapable of further movement, came to a dead stop in front of me. I stopped the car and investigated. It was a large turkey gobbler, with a broken leg and bleeding from the head. Its feathers appeared waterlogged, mixed with mud and filth of the road. I decided to put it into the station wagon with the hope of drying it out and splinting its leg at the Partridge residence; but as I picked up the dripping, almost disgusting black mass, I could tell, in the mud-stained light from my headlights, that the bird had expired. I held it for a moment, and then threw the pitiful thing over an embankment.

This incident added to my depression, and moment by moment I was convincing myself that the road would end in some mule trail, and that there Mothman would stand, staring at me with fiery eyes.

At the bend, however, my spirits lifted; for there stood a neat farm house, its upstairs not yet finished, with a jeep in the yard and the light in front, just as Partridge had described it on the phone.

Partridge came out onto the porch and motioned for me to park in the driveway. Cautiously around him peered little faces, three of his six handsome children. He gave me a warm welcome, and Mrs. Partridge, an attractive woman who appeared to be in her thirties, told me she was making coffee.

As I looked about the house I noted it was in the final stages of remodeling. Partridge, a building contractor, had bought it at a very reasonable price, was busily improving it.

The six children, four boys and two girls, crowded around, raptly gazing at my tape recorder, which I employ during interviews for accuracy and to free me from taking notes.

Again I noted the attractiveness of the children, all neatly scrubbed, very polite, and ready to be sent off to bed. One of them, a boy of about six, caught my particular attention. He was staring at me with large, blue luminous eyes, all the while staying at a more discrete distance than the other, more extraverted kids. More lightly complexioned than the rest, he presented an almost spectral appearance.

Knowing that I had a way with kids, and acting on an impulse, I suddenly fixed his gaze in mine, opened my mouth wide, displaying my teeth, in a short, but (I am sure) terrifying grimace. The boy's large eyes popped even bigger; then, breaking his deadpan expression, he cracked a big grin. He advanced toward me cautiously, and I smiled, grabbed him, and set him on my lap.

Once again his face became expressionless, and that strange haunting look came into his eyes.

He looked me straight in the eye.

"Old Bandit's gone!" he said.

I didn't quite know how to reply.

"Mister," he added, "do you think you can bring him back?"

Again, I was unable to answer his piteous remarks.

Partridge relieved my discomfiture by lifting the boy off my lap, and with a sharp but painless slap on the buttocks, said "Off to bed with you!" The child ran to the top of the stairs and paused, smiled, then returned the face I had made at him.

After the usual amenities and my assuring Partridge that I would write a fair report about him, I put a tape on my recorder and my host began to relate the series of circumstances that he could not explain, the gripping fear he had experienced for the first time on the night of November 15, 1966.

"There was a movie on TV, a dog movie; 'Missouri Champion' was the name of the dog," he began slowly, masking his reluctance to talk about the matter by timing his conversation with the slow refilling of his pipe.

"It was about 10:30 or twenty-five 'til eleven that night, and suddenly the TV blanked out. A real fine herringbone pattern appeared on the tube, and at

the same time the set started a loud whining noise, winding up to a high pitch, peaking and breaking off, as if you were on a musical scale and you went as high as you could and came back down and repeated it."

Partridge was certain the color set had not picked up any ordinary interference, for he considered himself an expert electronics technician, though he no longer followed the trade. "There would have to be a powerful electronic blanket of almost unbelievable degree present to cause those effects."

"It sounded like a generator winding up. It reminded me of a hand field generator that one might use for portable radio transmission in an emergency."

Puzzled by the interference and oddly frightened by it, Mr. and Mrs. Partridge waited a couple of minutes, hoping it would go away. Then the dog, outside, on the porch, began howling.

"It was a kind of wolf howl," he told me. "I remember that as children we would say a dog was 'singing' when it howled like that. Sometimes when you hit a high note on a guitar or accordion, apparently this would hurt the dog's ears and it would start howling like a wolf. Then you'd say, 'I've got a singing dog.' "

Believing the whining sound was causing the dog to howl, and finding it uncomfortable to their own ears, they turned the set off. Yet Bandit still continued the strange "singing". Partridge got a flashlight and went out onto the porch to investigate.

"The dog was sitting on the end of the porch, howling down toward the hay barn in the bottom. I shined the light in that direction, and it picked up two red circles, or eyes, which looked like bicycle reflectors. Still there was something about those eyes that is difficult to explain. When I was a kid I night hunted all the time, and I certainly know what animal eyes look like—such as 'coon, dog and cat eyes in the dark. These were much larger, for one thing. It's a good length of a football field down to that hay barn. Probably around 150 yards; still those eyes showed up huge, for that distance. They must have been much larger than bicycle reflectors."

From my conversation with him, I gathered that the eyes, in themselves, had peculiarly disturbed him. He said that they made "cold chills run over" him. Partridge didn't mention until later in the evening that he was disturbed and frightened from the time the interference first appeared on the screen. He also said there was a peculiar form to the almost undefinable shadows in the pattern. "I can't express what these things might have been—maybe they were

just suggestions of things that were very repulsive," he tried to explain. I gathered that the images must have really shocked him, for he refused to go any further in trying to interpret them, as if the very thought of them was painful.

Almost at the same moment the light from the flashlight reflected in the eyes, Bandit charged, violently but silently, toward them, his habit when attacking wild game. Partridge didn't "sic" the dog; in fact he yelled, probably because of his intuitive fear, for him to come back.

That fear must have been great, for he had no desire to follow the dog, as he usually would have done. A transcript of the tape recording is interesting on this point:

Barker: Would you say you were frightened?

Partridge: Well, I don't know. I didn't want to go out the door very bad.

Barker: But didn't you want to walk down to the barn to see what had happened?

Partridge: No, I don't think I would.

Barker: If it had been a bear down there, would you have walked down there?

Partridge: If I had ny gun in my hand, I would.

Barker: Did you go inside and get your gun?

Partridge: Yes, but I didn't go down there. In fact I slept with that gun loaded beside the bed all night.

Though greatly concerned about his pet, Partridge was beginning to forget about the interference, the eyes and his unearthly fear, when he picked up the Clarksburg Telegram two evenings later and read about the Mothman sightings by two young Point Pleasant couples. When he saw their report of the dog's carcass apparently connected with the bird creature they sighted, he immediately connected that event with his experience.

"I shouldn't have called up WBOY-TV, in Clarksburg," he said, "for that is how the news of my dog's disappearance came out. After they broke the story, other kids began teasing our kids at school, and I received crank telephone calls. Sometimes they simply said, 'I'm Mothman,' or something similar; then some of the calls consisted only of strange beeping noises."

He had the habit of telephoning the station when he needed information, for they were more "accommodating" than the local newspapers, and would go to considerable lengths to look up and give him information. Because he was in

the building contracting business, he had in the past mostly called about the weather.

He knew he could get the details on the Mothman and dog story if he could reach Pete Lyman, the commentator on the evening news programs, who usually was at the station between his 6:30 and 11:00 P.M. newscasts.

"Hello, Partridge," Pete spoke to him in his friendly manner. "What can I do for you this evening? You want the weather report?"

Partridge explained that he was interested in the Mothman report, even though he felt embarrassed about asking, for he didn't want to reveal why he was interested.

Pete excused himself, soon returned with all the wire stories and read them to him. Perhaps it was the tone of Partridge's voice or Pete's uncanny sense of a news lead which led to the latter's question.

"I don't want to pry, Newell," Pete told him, "but my nose for news is itching. You haven't seen anything unusual down in your area, have you?"

Pete had read the stories in a serious tone, and had always been helpful and friendly. Before he could give it a second thought, he told him about the eyes and the disappearance of Bandit.

"Gee, I'd like to send our reporter out there, if you wouldn't mind," Pete begged. "He's just returned from Point Pleasant, and though some of the boys here tend to laugh at the story, Bill is really convinced that those two young couples were telling the truth. He's dead convinced it wasn't a sandhill crane they saw—as that university professor claimed."

After they hung up, Partridge realized he hadn't made a really good investigation, if any at all. In fact, he had never gone down to the barn to look for any evidence which might be there. Perhaps the dog had encountered some wild animal and had been killed—though he could scarcely imagine any animal roaming locally which would be large or strong enough to seriously harm the 110-lb. dog.

"The next day I began thinking about this," he told me. "Though the reporter wasn't coming until three o'clock that afternoon (Thursday), I got to thinking about my wife and kids and the Mothman business, decided to cancel a couple of appointments with clients, and come home early and investigate.

"I walked out to the barn, looking for tracks. Here and there I could see Bandit's paw prints. These were rather easy to find, for he was a heavy dog, and the area was muddy, with remains of only sparse grass. Cattle had been fenced in the area, and their trampings had killed off most of the grass."

Partridge then noted an unusual development. He discovered a great number of Bandit's tracks concentrated at the very spot where he had seen the huge reflecting eyes.

"Those tracks were going in a circle, as if that dog had been chasing his tail—though he never did that. And that was that. I couldn't see them go off anywhere, though I did see a series of fresh tracks which apparently led from the porch to the spot where he ran in circles. There were no other tracks of any kind."

"Had the dog been baying an animal—say a bear or deer (the two were occasionally seen in the area)—what would the dog have done under these circumstances?" I asked.

'That dog would have attacked it. He would attack any wild animal because he repeatedly killed wild game. He never even fought smaller game: he just slit their throats and that would be the end of it."

"Would Bandit ever run around an animal and bark at it before attacking?"

"No, he was a smart hunter. I've watched him kill: he usually would slither on his belly like a snake until he was in springing distance; then he would give one leap and slit their throats. He never made any sound when he was after something."

"That would account, then," I remarked, "for his silence that night?"

"When my light picked up those eyes," he told me, "his hair bristled straight up on his back, and he was really moving when he took off. He even flipped the sod up behind him. He was really moving. He was on a straight course for it, whatever it was."

"What animal would be capable of killing a dog his size?"

"I don't know of any animal capable of killing that dog, because I know I have tried to hold his head between my hands; and Roger, my oldest boy, and I, have both tried to hold that dog on the ground while playing with him, and both of us together couldn't hold him down."

At that moment, as I was looking directly at my host, my eyes caught something at the window a few feet behind him. Whatever it was, it appeared there only momentarily after I had spotted it—definitely a face of some sort, barely illuminated by the lights of the room. I started visibly. From Partridge's facial expression, I could somehow feel (though this is difficult to explain) that he not only knew I had seen it, but that he would rather I didn't verbalize about it; so I didn't. Probably it had been some curious neighbor trying to find out who his visitor was—though the nearest house was a considerable distance

away.

My momentary reaction probably reflected the peculiar undertone to the whole affair, a suggestion of some abnormal, unnamed fear. Partridge had partly expressed this in noting his unusual emotional disturbance when the television acted in such an abnormal fashion. He summed it up well, it seemed, when he remarked, "I think that the hardest thing to explain is the feeling involved."

"Could you try to explain it?" I asked.

"I don't know quite how to do so, except to say it was an eerie feeling. I have never had this sort of feeling before. It was as if you knew something was wrong, but couldn't place just what it was."

"Do you have any idea as to what possibly killed your dog?"

"No, I don't have any ideas, except it was something that took my dog off. This Mothman—I don't know quite what to believe about that. I don't think there is a bird big enough to carry off that huge dog. But I do know the feeling that was here that night. It wasn't like an animal feeling."

"What do you mean by 'animal feeling'?"

"You can tell if there's an animal prowling. That night the dog commotion was different. The way that dog was acting, there was nothing connected with anything animal. Bandit never howls at animals. You hear one growl, he tears the animal's throat out, and that's all there is to it.

"One night, for example, when we were just going to bed, we heard the awfulest commotion out there in the yard, and Bandit sounded just like he was tearing the side of the house out. I grabbed the gun and ran out there barefooted, and he had already taken off up the hill, after whatever it was. But he chased it to the edge of the woods and came back. Of course that was an animal; you could tell that it was. It likely was a big 'coon or 'possum or something like that. But the other night it was entirely different. It wasn't any animal. He didn't act like it was an animal; he acted more like it was somebody prowling around, except for the howl. I have never heard him howl like that.

"I don't think that anybody could explain the feeling we had, other than to experience it for himself. I don't scare easily; I've stayed out in the woods all night by myself, and I wouldn't be afraid to go up there in the woods and sleep all night. But that night it was different: the queer patterns on the TV that reminded you of something unmentionable, though you couldn't quite identify it; that unearthly noise of the interference, Bandit's howling; and most of all, those red eyes."

I had a final cup of coffee, and against the protestations of the Partridges, told them I must go. Among the country folk of central West Virginia it is a custom to protest a guest's leaving, even thought the departure may represent some relief. It is reciprocally polite to offer many excuses for departing.

"Come back and see us," Mrs. Partridge said, and I could tell this was a genuine invitation, beyond the protocol of civility.

"I hope I can," I promised.

Partridge accompanied me to the car.

"Mr. Partridge," I asked, "what do you really think it was? What do you really think you saw. What do you really think happened?"

He thought silently for a few seconds.

"I don't know. I only know that my dog's gone."

He grew even more silent.

"I think I'm becoming convinced, from talking with you," I told him, "that there's something real behind this Mothman talk."

"I don't care," he replied. "All this speculation is confusing to a man like me."

He then spoke slowly and softly:

"But," he said, "you really ought to be around here on a morning, when that six-year-old who sat in your lap gets up, 'way ahead of the rest of us, and goes out that front door—his voice sort of trilling, musical like. It would just break your heart if you could hear him—a callin' that dog."

CHAPTER 2

THE RECORDER

When the news about Mothman and the other outre happenings in the Ohio valley reached the outside world the Recorder was sent in to sift the Truth from the Lie and to write all these things down on high quality paper.

The Recorder arrived shortly after the first sightings. Sitting at the wheel of a large van which swayed and bumped and thumped over the crooked roads, he fancied himself to arrive in the city of Point Pleasant with great ceremony.

In reality, nobody took notice of his coming, though in his mind's eye he pictured huge crowds greeting him, reporters and red carpets.

"When they really hear of me, they'll be impressed. When they see my multifarious electronic gear and my sophisticated cameras, and my reels of tapes and films, they'll kneel at my feet," he mused.

Perched ungainly in the driver's seat, he kept his head up high, in his usual pose of importance, even though often he could not see out, his vision obstructed by the rear view mirror, which he constantly observed to detect those who surely followed him and checked up on him. One time they had stopped him, and he drew out huge folders of cards, showing each one, explaining each document, until those Mysterious Ones fled from his oral aggression.

He got out of the van and stretched his tall body, then assumed a facial expression of ennui. As he surveyed the Ohio valley scene, he smiled, and wondered to himself if he had caught just the right facial expression, the correct nuance, to express himself to the world perchance he were photographed or asked to go on TV.

He then performed one of his rituals. He unbuttoned his jacket carefully, and from the inside pocket took a pair of impressive horn rimmed spectacles and put them on. He swayed slightly sidewise, because of the glasses' distortion, and once again surveyed his surroundings, turning and looking in all directions. He was alone. He clicked his ears. Though he felt there might be those who could perform this clicking, he doubted it, and he permitted himself once more to smile.

The spectacle case was still in his hand. He inserted his fingernails into the opening of the spring-shut case and pried it apart, allowing it to shut with a loud snap.

"AUTOMATIC!" he said to himself in a suddenly-assumed high-pitched voice, "AUTOMATIC!"

The Recorder again found himself experiencing that strange feeling of impotence, disorientation and fright. He must go up to the mountain, where, at that altitude, he could function with the power that only he possessed.

So, laboriously, and panting, he climbed to the highest hill he could find, dragging the heavy gear with him, with many a stop for catching a breath and surveying the dizzying heights.

Once at the top he set all of it up. The people down there, below, didn't have fine instruments like his, nor their capabilities; for, operating at this height, he had a power over them, and a cognizance of their activities of which they could never guess or dream.

Now he could find out everything and properly Record it. Hooking up his sensitive instruments, powered by the movements of the Earth, the progression of the sun and the planets, and the Energy he sucked up from those Inferiors in the valley, he soon began to take down what had happened, what was happening, and what probably would happen.

The instruments recorded the Mothman, the Three Men In Black, and the fantastic Flying Saucers. It would all be taken down, all right.

After a day and a night and one half of Recording, he decided it was due time for his favorite recreation. He had no tape of it, for this music was of such transcendental nature that it could never possibly be Recorded. But it was firmly implanted in his mind, and he could now hear it and feel it, as once again it was his calling to be exalted high above all mortal occupations and things.

"It's childish, I know," but he once again indulged himself. He turned his back to the valley and faced the vast unseen orchestra, pulled a limb from a

tree which he employed as a baton. Grotesquely waving, this, he could hear the "Huff! Huff! Huff!" of the great Steam Horns well up, the Academic Horns chime in, the Seagulls adding their peculiar squawking. The German Horns added their subtle, deliquescent airs to the otherwise somewhat cacaphonous though awe-inspiring performance. Suddenly he dropped the baton and quietness descended. Taking his pen from his pocket, he knew he had it at last! With one neat incision he deleted the Far-Away Horns for a full measure.

Then, for the first time, he performed the first highly satisfactory rendition of The Symphony of the Horns.

As he led the great orchestra he knew that, as in the past, this music had provided the inspiration, almost the stage itself, for setting the drama that was transpiring in the valley below. He increased the tempo, and finally fell into fast gyrations, turning and turning, until he caught onto a great tree for support; then he embraced it and identified with it.

He turned on all of his equipment. From his Television Kit he withdrew great Idiot Cards, and hung them on over-size easels. Throwing away all pens and selecting a huge black marker from his chest, he filled the Cards with large characters, telling the story that was occurring below.

Now he could see all things in the valley. He could penetrate the walls, see through the curtains, and behind the masks. Suddenly he knew what was happening. He knew the secrets of everything and everybody.

And he knew all the things the people of the valley were thinking, and they were good. At last he knew that they loved him, and that he loved them, and that he loved all mankind.

And so it was that the greatest power of his experience came upon the Recorder, and he became capable of Recording all things.

And he became capable of the gift of Reorientation; so he took liberties with time and space, and he reassigned names, and he lifted people from one place and put them down into another, and the people below loved him more, and they applauded, and they gathered in a great moving human throng, advancing upon the Recorder.

They carried him off the mountain, into the valley, across the great bridge into Ohio, shouting.

CHAPTER 3

THE LONELY PLACE

Linda Scarberry looked across the seat of the ’57 Chevy and admired her husband, Roger. Big framed, blonde, and laconic, he usually masked his more subtle feelings in a kind of Puckish silence. However, she could see the muscles ripple under the frayed leather jacket, and she could tell that his powerful physical form was tense.

She knew he was hurt. He had answered an ad placed by a new factory, but Roger’s name had been passed by. Roger had a good work record, and a letter of recommendation from two previous employers whose businesses were seasonal. The new jobs had been offered on the Ohio side, however, where preference was given to local Gallipolis and Middletown boys.

Steve Mallette, in the back seat, and Roger’s almost inseparable buddy, was in the same predicament. Steve and he had put their names in together, and both had been turned down.

Mary Mallette saw Linda’s furtive glance at the driver and regarded her own husband through the corner of her eye. Different from Roger as “night and day”, Steve was always play acting, hiding a deeply sensitive nature.

“Let’er go, Rog, don’t be so light on the foot! Just because we’re old married men is no reason to let those young snotnosed kids drag us!”

“Steve, don’t!” Mary protested. “We don’t want to get ourselves killed!”

Roger had shown up about nine that evening, just like he used to do in their carefree courting days.

“Let’s get out and drag. I got a full tank of gas and a girl ready for speed!”

Steve laughed, walked out and kicked at the bumper.

"You can't drag in that can. Why, I'd be afraid to ride around the block in that pile of bolts. I'd expect the transmission to drop out before you got to the Lewis gate!"

And so Roger and Steve bantered, while Mary and Linda held their own conversation. When she could get Linda alone, she would tell her how Steve had held her for an hour the past night, sobbing and telling her over and over how he had so greatly wanted the job.

"We won't go to the welfare department. We're too proud. I'll get work somewhere," he repeated, over and over.

As they talked, Mary became imbued with the same excitement that evidently was affecting the men. After their weddings, which took place only two months apart, they had suddenly effected a more "adult" outlook on life. They stopped turning up twice each week at the drive-in hamburger stand, and were no longer known in the teenage community as the draggers who would never be called "chicken"

For Roger and Steve, their self-imposed "grown-upness" had climaxed in their seeking employment at the new plant and being turned down. Roger had collected a $4.00 debt, bought that amount in gas, and was determined to "celebrate" their misfortune and disappointment.

Excitement welled up in Mary. It was during such an adventure when she had first looked at Steve with a strange new feeling, one that she did not understand. Impulsively she had grasped his hand, something she seldom did, and held onto it tightly. He had suddenly returned the grip. He grew silent. Then he said, "I want to marry you, as soon as possible."

Although her marriage to Steve had lost little of that excitement discovered in that dark, parked car—just as tonight, with Roger and Linda in the front, she had the feeling that tonight she might recapture that haunting, indescribable emotion she had experienced the night Steve proposed.

So she applied makeup; Steve tossed on a sweater and grabbed his jacket from the closet, and they got into the back seat. Then the ritual began: the ride up Route 62, and the peregrinations in and out of the non-patrolled roads in the lonely T.N.T. area.

They drove around and around, "burning rubber" on the graveled roads between the main drags. But that night the area was deserted. They encountered no other cars, except old Mrs. Henry, sitting stiffly in her anachronistic, yet gleaming Model A Ford and gazing with disapproval at all drivers whom she met or who passed her.

“Gee, I wonder where all the kids are?” Roger remarked as he made a skidding left into the T.N.T. plant grounds. Completely abandoned since World War II, the old munitions complex loomed huge and ghost-like. No longer did the owners, whoever and wherever they were, bother to lock the gates to the property, and it had become a favorite parking ground for young lovers, and stag groups who threw stones at the remaining glassed windows.

“Maybe we’ll catch somebody at it,” remarked Steve, and Roger laughed.

“Steve!” Mary shouted in disapproval.

“You were young once yourself, old lady,” Steve rejoined, “don’t be so blue-nosed.”

“But we never…”

Steve grasped her hand, and she grew silent.

Roger halted the car in front of the powerhouse. A bright moon outlined the vast, ghostly structure. The broken windows stared like blind eyes at them, as clouds, caught in high winds, threw intermittent pools of shadow on the lonely place. The blustery local winds shook loosened parts of the powerhouse while wailing through its empty blackness.

And there in that dark setting, lurking close to the cadaverous structure, Mothman came to Point Pleasant.

“Rog, look! Look at those eyes!” Steve yelled.

“Then I too saw them,” Scarberry told me.

“Those eyes. It was like they were staring at me, like they were looking inside me, and through me!” he continued.

“You couldn’t draw away from those eyes. I don’t know if they were hypnotic or if it was the shade of them. It was a different color, you know, kind of red; they just glowed and lit up when light hit them (actual words from tape recording).”

Benjamin Franklin IV, retired school executive, an apt professional magician (and a direct descendant of the noted ancestor), sat with me and four witnesses around a table in a relative’s kitchen, as the story of their wild flight from the T.N.T. area, and from Mothman, unfolded.

When Steve saw the eyes, his reaction marked the beginning of a miasma of fear which would continue to plague the couple long after the initial experience. His first impulse was to get out of there, but the eyes held him momentarily in an almost hypnotic trance, while he tried to fill in the features of the creature or thing which looked out through them.

It was a tall, waddling, ungainly thing. Folded around and behind its

shadowy body was an enormous pair of wings. It seemed to be trying to get away, out of the light.

"It was more or less running," Steve told us, "trying to balance itself with its wings which spread slightly outward. It staggered like a crippled chicken as it disappeared around the corner of the building. I'm sure it was trying to get out of sight, into the door just around the corner.

"We paused for about a minute, not knowing what to do. The girls hadn't got a good look at it, though Mary had caught a glimpse of its eyes."

Roger insisted it was only a bird of some kind, and that they had nothing to fear. But he hadn't got a good look at it, as had Steve.

"It looks something like those old pictures in the family bible. Like an evil angel. I don't think we ought to hang around here any longer," Steve argued.

This description startled Roger, and suddenly convinced that Steve was right, he pushed in the clutch and shifted into second. The Chevy lurched forward and stopped, as the motor died.

"Roger, it's not going to let us go," Linda screamed. "Let's get out of here and run!"

Roger ground at the starter. In his excitement he had flooded the engine. He pushed the gas feed to the floor and turned the engine over a few times. Waiting a few precious seconds, while the suspense, and his fright mounted, he tried the starter again and the motor uttered an encouraging cough. But the starter slowed, gave one last groan and quit. The battery was dead.

"Hurry, give me a shove. We're on a downhill grade," he insisted to Steve.

"I didn't want to get out of that car, but I was desperate, I suppose. I felt that that thing was going to come back around that corner and get us at any moment. But I knew we had to get out of there. I jumped out, put my hands in the window frame and rocked the car. After a few rocks it began to move, and then I really shoved at that old Chevy!"

The car gradually picked up momentum on the downgrade, and Steve pushed harder, each yard of progress putting him farther out of reach of a nameless horror. He did not look back, for fear the ugly thing was looking at him, following him, ready to jump on his back.

With a grinding of gears Roger threw the shift into low, and released the clutch. The car paused, stiffened, and backfired. Then the motor started with little spurts, and he pushed in the clutch and gunned it. Linda opened the door, crying, "Hurry, Steve!" and he hopped in.

Roger let out the clutch and burned rubber.

“I guess we’re getting away from that old buzzard!” he yelled jauntily. But Steve knew that by then Roger was just as frightened as he.

“I saw the back of old Rog’s neck get white,” Steve told us, “and he’s always red back there,” and he grasped his crony’s head and twisted it, somewhat to the other’s embarrassment, to show us the ruddy complexioned neck.

“Could those have been animal eyes, do you think?” Ben Franklin asked Steve.

“I see a lot of animal eyes at night. You could see them along the road all the time. These eyes seemed to be so much larger. That’s what made me notice them.”

“Would you say they were as big as a half-dollar?” I asked.

“They were bigger!” Roger averred. “When you see animal eyes on the road, they just aren’t that large, or spaced as far apart. Then this thing was six or seven foot tall.”

“That’s about as tall as I am,” I joked, but nobody laughed. The witnesses were ready to recount the further events of the night.

Once the suspense of starting the stalled car had ended, their fears lessened, and they were further relieved as they turned off the side road onto the main highway, which would take them back into town. Route 62 is very crooked in that area, and they slowed to a comfortable 40 miles per hour. But Mothman’s reign of terror had just begun.

As they rounded a bend and their lights reflected momentarily on a small hillside, they saw it again, standing there, as if waiting. That was where they got their terrifying, best look at it.

“You couldn’t tell if it had a head or not, or if it had arms. I don’t think it had any, but it had wings. I mean you could tell the wings, for they came up and turned down, you know, and kind of wrapped around behind it!

“Those eyes were about two inches in diameter, and six to eight inches apart.”

Did you see its legs?” Ben directed this question to Roger, who was speaking, but Mary interrupted:

“Yes, it definitely had legs. They seemed to be as thick as a man’s legs!”

“You mean, not like a bird’s legs?”

“They were muscular legs. You could tell that, somehow,” Steve declared.

“Did you see any feathers, or skin, or clothing?”

“Not that we could distinguish as such. I mean I couldn’t say if it were fur,

feathers or what!"

"What color was the thing?"

"You couldn't see exactly. We saw it only for a few brief moments, before it took off, as if it couldn't stand the light, I guess you could say it had a grayish body."

"Did you see any knee, or bend in the legs?"

"No, I did not."

Mothman's departure was as novel as its appearance. When it left it did not flap its wings, but took off vertically, shooting upward into the air like a rocket at great speed, but without visible means of propulsion.

Scarberry had hit the brake when he saw the apparition the second time. He didn't know why, except that again the eyes had demonstrated a hypnotic effect, which held him "in its spell". Upon the creature's takeoff, however, the spell was broken, but supplanted with indescribable fright.

He tried to drive the gas pedal into the floor, as the car quickly picked up speed and the wheels screamed on curves. As the road straightened he became aware that the speedometer was hitting 100, then 105. He didn't know the old car would do it, but at the moment that didn't impress him. He only knew he wanted to get out of there, and back into town. Linda clutched at him, sobbing.

"Can't you go any faster?"

"I'm doing all this old car will do!"

In the back seat, Mary screamed.

"I see it, I see it!" It's after us!"

Clutching and tearing at the wheel, Roger saw the dark shadow, subtle and indistinct in the moonlight. Along with the shadow was the feeling that something was stalking them. He knew it was up there, following them, at incredible speed.

The huge hulk of a trailer truck loomed suddenly; Roger swerved and screamed around it in a tight curve, careening almost into the ditch to avoid an oncoming car with its brights up.

"I just had to get away from that thing," he told us. "It's a wonder we didn't crack up!"

He became a part of the speeding and complaining machinery that was the '57 Chevy. Linda now gripped him like a madwoman. From behind, Steve leaned forward, grabbed his shoulders and shook him.

"Get out of here! Get out of here!"

Steve's fingers, in terrified frenzy, dug into his shoulders. Then he pounded

at him, and at the front seat.

"I know it's after us! Let's make it! It's keeping right up with us!" Mary cried.

"I know my hair stood on end," Steve declared, "and I was pushin' and poundin' at old Rog to make him go faster, and all that time that old junker was doin' all she would do. I don't know what came over me. I've been scared before, but nothing like that."

Ben asked Steve to describe his fear, but he couldn't.

"Seemed like you could feel it all around you; seemed like it left my mind a blank till we got to where we could talk about it. All I could think of was getting away from it."

"Really though," Roger chimed in, "I don't think any of us really felt we had seen it until we got down the road and got to talking about it and knew all of us had seen the same thing."

"It was kind of like a dream—a bad dream," Mary added.

The gathering clouds had blocked out the moon, and no longer could they see Mothman's shadow, though they could still feel the presence, hovering above them.

On December 15, 1967, exactly one year and one month from the advent of Mothman, another kind of darkness would descend upon Point Pleasant. People would gather in little groups and murmur about what had occurred:

"We drive up there and it's barricaded. I wish we could get rid of it. If we didn't have the barricade, people would drive up there and go into the river. We've got to build a new street or a memorial of some kind up there."

And meanwhile there would be boats, dozens of them, plying the muddy waters, searching, dragging for bodies.

"One woman's husband ran off, and he's no doubt over in Cleveland, Ohio. But she stands down there on the river bank, hoping they'll drag him up. People are strange. She'd rather have a dead husband in her arms, all still and cold from the bottom of that river—rather than know that he was alive, and embracing that bitch from Cleveland!"

CHAPTER 4

LIKE A BIG FAT BIRD

For John Peters the proud bravado of the Fifth Symphony, the sobbing of Tchaikovsky, the "Te DUM DUM DUM!" of Aida's Grand March, and the subtle nuances of Debussy, had been stilled. WPDX, Clarksburg's powerful daytime radio station, had abandoned its more dignified programming, and had gone "all country", as the trade papers described the burgeoning of total country and western music programming among many stations. South of the Mason-Dixon line many small broadcasters, unable to show a profit in competition with the established "hard rock" stations, had taken advantage of the resurgence of the often-nasal, more often dulcet and sad, airs of the Nashville establishment. And some of these stations were making money for the first time since Uncle Milton Berle had peered out at America through the ghostly phosphors of the TV screen.

John pushed the button that would put the corn remedy tape cartridge on the air. In the old days he had read "live" all the public service announcements, and the too few sponsored commercials. His artistic senses smarting, he unfolded the pay check he had just received and rationalized the situation. Recent broadcast technology had made his job easier, and he was receiving greater talent fees.

He put on the next commercial, back to back with the preceding. With some relief he noted the management had asked Kim Smith, another staff announcer, to do that one.

It described, in the most shocking script possible for airing, the movie that "Skyline Sam", a local motion picture exhibitor who booked exploitation movies, was promoting. It explained that "This is an adult movie, for adult minds, and nobody under sixteen will be admitted."

Sam would probably have a policeman at the ticket window, early in the evening, who would identify and turn away a few teenagers, who would immediately drive back to town and spread the news. Later in the evening the "policeman" would shed his rented uniform, don his white jacket and take up his regular duties at the snack bar. The drive-in theatre would be jam-packed and Sam would buy more and more commercials.

John's station had retained a little of the earlier programming, including three preachers from the midwest who bought time on the station to solicit letters for free literature from local folk. One of them, though occasionally deprecating the money system, still begged "free will" donations from listeners. And the schedule was still fouled up between 9:05 and 9:10, a short segment between the news and the first preacher, which the management had been unable or unwilling to get rid of by reshuffling programs, for the past three years. They had asked John to "fill" the segment. Ordinarily an announcer would simply play a couple of records to get through the space, but John, a really fine radio man, apparently frustrated by mediocrity, found the short segment an outlet for his extraordinary wit.

I am a school equipment salesman, and for three years have driven out of Clarksburg each Monday to call on clients throughout the state. I usually listen to the station as I go, for the Clarksburg signal remains strong for about fifty miles, and John is always pleasant to listen to as he occasionally injects subtle wit into his announcing. I don't know how he got the idea for "Whistle Stop", but I think I heard the first broadcast of the unique five-minute show.

Apparently John had become bored with the usual fill in.

That morning he began the segment with some patter, pretending he was the proprietor of a small "whistle stop" railway station.

In the background a sound effect record provided the faint whistling of an approaching train. The whistling grew in volume, as John turned up the gain, until it became evident that the recording featured an old fashioned steam locomotive. The whistling and noise grew still louder. In a frightful puffing, clanging of bells, and rattling of wheels, the train noise welled to a crescendo, then began to diminish.

"Well," John said, "she went right on by!—like a big fat bird this morning!"

Then he announced, "Let's turn up the radio and hear a musical selection." The patter and sound effects had consumed enough time so that he could fill the remaining time with just one record. I took to listening to the short show with a

peculiar enjoyment I couldn't explain. It was something different, I suppose—though repetitious, for the train never stopped at the small and apparently nondescript station of John's living imagination.

His handling of the short show probably expressed his rebellion at the management which never bothered to remedy the faulty scheduling.

When the station went "all country", the scheduling still was not remedied, and John still rebelled. While he had previously played pop recordings, now he played a short classical selection in the midst of the wailings of the preachers and the voices of Nashville.

As I steered my Ford wagon toward the Ohio valley to interview the Mothman witnesses, Woodrow Derenberger, and to try to track down the golden ball Mr. Universe had forged, John's station still came in loud and clear, though now beginning to suffer interference from faulty electrical transformers along the road as the signal weakened.

On that morning I heard the train come in, and I listened for the familiar wheels to clang past the station. But I had a real surprise. John must have found a new sound effects record.

The train, though gaining its usual momentum with its whistle running wild, suddenly decreased in its cacophany. There was a hissing of air brakes and a creaking of slowing wheels. Couplings rumbled as the engineer tried to orient the passengers cars to the platform. Finally all was quiet, except for the "Shine! Shine! Shine!" of the steam locomotive's air compressor.

"O-hooo! She stopped!" John announced. "Now that IS something. Let's see who is getting off! O-hooo! We see and are we edified! It's a group of little green men, and O-hooo, there is a great bird with them, and they're marching, and marching, with their little drums, around and around the station…"

I gathered he was playing a record backward, probably at an exaggerated speed. It sounded like Oriental music, with bingings of cymbals, and drums sound mixed with a mad piping. I could almost see the little men marching, along with a huge ungainly bird.

After about a minute of this, John hit the mike button to remark that a huge shipment of bird seed was being loaded aboard the express car. There was a slow, then a fast puffing, as the drive wheels spun on a wet track. Gradually the train got going, with shouts of encouragement from the announcer.

John was evidently doing a satire on the Mothman reports. The short segment had been a work of radio art the quality of which was seldom heard in the local area, containing not only humor but a great deal of creative fantasy. I

wondered if I were also getting involved in fantasy and if I were on a wild goose chase—or a wild Mothman chase!

But the apparent truthfulness of Newell Partridge, and the sad eyes of the child who had lost his dog, still convinced me that the Ohio valley reports were worth full investigation.

And later, as I sat around the table with Ben Franklin and the two young couples, their sincerity, also, would be impressive.

At the National Guard Armory the lights of the city of Point Pleasant begin. At that point Mothman, according to the wives, made a final pass at the car, and they could hear its wings flapping. Apparently afraid of the lights and avoiding the populated area, the terrifying nemesis gave up the chase.

Not until they approached their familiar stopping place, Dairy Land, did they feel the pall of fear lift. They drove in and parked. They wondered if they should tell the couple in the next car, John Perry and Ellen Lund, about it, and decided against it. They sat there and tried to collect their wits.

One anomaly of their experience had been as strange as the thing itself. Mothman, as frightening as it had been, and as hypnotic as its strange red eyes had been, displayed yet another inexplicable characteristic. It was, it seemed, both real and unreal; both frightening and compelling; both repelling and fascinating.

None of them knew why they suddenly developed the urge to once again face the unknown thing. The event had been so unreal for one thing, that they could hardly believe they had experienced it. Part of their fascination may have been the attempting to prove to themselves, as they later would try to prove to others, that it had all been real.

Or it might have been some inexplicable archetypal urge, as incomprehensible as the instincts of Arctic lemmings which periodically commit mass suicide as thousands of them hurl themselves over cliffs into the ocean?

And it may be that such urges are those illustrated in old prints which picture the damned souls of Hell, charging willingly into the immense opened jaw of a dragon which spouts venom and flame.

Mary insisted they call the city police and ask them to go with them.

"They'd never believe us," Roger reasoned.

"It would have been like the time the old Adams house burned down," he told us. "We called the police and they thought we were pulling their legs. They said, 'Spit on it, but don't throw any of that booze on it or you'll start a

real fire!"

The Lewis Gate is not some sophisticated geographic landmark, but it is widely referred to among the younger set of Point Pleasant. To them, driving their circuitous routes out of, then back into town, it is an important location. For a mile or two on Route 62 there is no place to turn a car around. But at the Lewis Gate, an old farm gate at the Lewis place, there is a spot beside the road wide enough to turn with only one back-up.

"At the Lewis Gate," Roger told us, "we were getting away from the lights of town, and the darkness made us 'chicken' once again. The girls once more insisted that we should report what we saw to the police. By that time Steve and I also were thinking better of our actions. We didn't want to be chased by that thing again, so I broke the tie and created a majority for turning back."

As they approached the gate, Roger hit the left turn signal and eased the car into the familiar turn pattern.

"What is that!" Mary cried out.

Roger had eased the car to a stop, close to the gate; for to make the turn with only one backup (a miscalculation, and two backups could lose a Point Pleasant teenager much prestige), one had to be precise. He leaned over Linda and looked at the thing lying at the side of the car, now almost undefinable after the headlights had left it.

"Get the flashlight," Steve yelled, "Maybe somebody's hurt!"

Roger reached over Linda and withdrew the flashlight from the glove compartment. Nervously he shined it at the object.

It was a large dog, a hound of some sort, they gathered from their quick inspection.

"Oh, that poor thing," Linda sympathized. "Somebody's hit it and it's crawled off the road to die."

"Get out, Steve," Mary begged, "and see if it's hurt badly. Maybe we can take it to a veterinary."

"It's dead, I can tell," Steve said as he shined the light on it again; "dead as a doornail."

"Then, from behind a tree, or from the ditch," Roger told us, "this thing came out and jumped over the car. We got a good sight of it running through the field, still staggering sidewise like a crippled chicken!"

Again shaken, and their anti-phobic urges dispelled by the third sighting of the creature, the men assented to their wives' request and decided to drive back to the police station.

"We first went to Tiny's Drive-in. I suppose we did this in order to get Gary Northup's reaction to what we had seen. We've always admired him. As we arrived, he and two employees were leaving, but we blew the horn and stopped him and told him about it.

" 'Are you kids drinking?' he asked. Then, looking at the girls, then back at us, and seeing how pale we were, he apologized: 'I'm sorry. You look all shaken up!' Then he went into the Drive-In and called the police.

"The cops told us to drive back up the road and that they would follow us. We stopped at the Lewis Gate to show the officers the dog carcass, but it was gone! About a mile up the road we saw this thing again, on the left side of the road in the field. We stopped, but when Gary's car, ahead of the police, caught up, the thing suddenly disappeared."

The police parked in the T.N.T. area and invited Mallette to get in and sit with them. But no Mothman. Occasionally a dark shadow would come over the building. This puzzled the officers because they couldn't determine the source of the shadow.

Although the obvious skepticism of the officers had never been well hidden, Steve noted a discernable change of attitude, and, for the first time, a suggestion of fear in the men, when the sergeant began sending a radio report back to the dispatcher at Point Pleasant.

During the dispatcher's first response a strange transmission, apparently of great power, completely blotted out most of the reply.

"What did this transmission sound like, or what did it say?" I asked Steve.

"It didn't say anything. It was a high-pitched noise, kind of like, I'd say, a record playing at a fast speed, but still not distinct. You couldn't distinguish any words or anything. I heard something like that on the Adams Family TV program (he referred to a humorous horror TV series which utilized weird music and sound effects).

"It was also like when you run under a power line that's leaking, when the noise blots out the car radio—only in this instance the squeaky sounds came through."

Roger interrupted: "Have you ever heard a mouse squeak?"

"I think so," I replied.

"But really loud and strong, but still like a mouse?"

"Would it be like a transistor radio squeal, when it isn't functioning correctly?" I countered.

"Yes, but this wasn't like a radio, either. I just can't describe it. We were

parked near the cruiser and everybody in my car heard it."

The strange transmission ceased, and was not repeated. After half an hour the police decided to abandon the vigil, and everybody drove back to town.

"When we were going to bed that night," Roger continued, "I swear that I heard that squeaking sound again, right over the trailer. In fact it had been hard for us to go to sleep ever since all this happened. Linda gets so frightened in the middle of the night. Sometimes she'll get up and it will be half an hour before she gets settled down again and goes to sleep."

"I still get the feeling that it's around," Steve added. "It's just a feeling, but sometimes you almost know it is there. You can't see it, but you know it's around, and that it's watching you from the darkness!"

The next day, still shaken by their experiences, but again strangely compelled to revisit the scene, the two couples decided to return to the T.N.T. area and investigate.

Steve entered the old power plant building through a decrepit door, sagging on rusty hinges. He heard a loud clang. He started, then surveyed the interior. One of the large boiler doors was open.

Aside from that noise, the interior was strangely quiet. Then he noted the reason: the large flock of pigeons that previously had occupied the building and filled it with flappings and cooings were no longer there. He wondered why. Could Mothman have frightened them away? The creature probably was using the building as a hideout.

He heaved at one of the other large boiler doors. It was rusty and didn't give easily. Finally the complaining hinges gave way and the door swung open. As it opened, Steve once again experienced that compelling fear of the previous night, and felt he should get out of there.

Then, suddenly in the cavernous darkness of the immense boiler, a large dark form seemed to flutter by. Steve stumbled out of the building, white as a sheet.

"It's in there! It's in the boiler!"

They wondered what they should do. But none of them could summon enough courage to re-enter the building.

"Hey, look at this," Roger shouted, bending near the ground. "I think we've found its tracks!"

They examined the important finding.

"They aren't bird tracks, that's for sure!" commented Steve. "They're more like horse tracks."

Impressed in the coal dust was a series of broken ovals, somewhat horeshoe-shaped, but only about three or four inches in diameter. Roger put his foot beside one of them and bore his weight down. But the Mothman track remained much more deeply impressed.

"I had to work my feet around several times to make as deep a track as those," he told me. The thing must have been much heavier than I."

Next they drove to the Lewis Gate, where they had spotted the dead dog, and there, too, were the tracks, along with those of a dog, in a soft, muddy spot.

"We examined the ditch there. The thing must have leaped out of it when it jumped over the car, for something had dug into the side of the ditch, apparently as it was climbing out. It was all torn up, and reminded us of a spot near the T.N.T. building where something had just stood and clawed up the ground."

They also checked at the Thomas residence the next day, after the thing had dropped into the yard the night following the initial sighting. They found only one track, but the ground was very solid there.

"You know," Roger added, "I don't know whether it was really trying to get us or not. I believe it could have got us if it had really wanted to. Sometimes I get the impression it might have been trying to communicate, and that would be why it chased after us. But instead it scared us."

"Are you saying you think it might be friendly?" Ben Franklin asked.

"I don't know. It might be. I only wish I knew."

Ben and I drove over to the Ohio side, rather than stopping at the nearby Gene Ball's restaurant, and we needed some time to collect our thoughts after the amazing interview. Both of us, usually garrulous, had grown silent as soon as we had left the witnesses.

"I believe it wants to tell us something!"

Ben blurted this out suddenly and loudly, breaking the silence.

Of course I knew Ben might not be too objective about Mothman, for he was a man who could never find evil in anybody. That probably was why he had been such a good school man. He was widely known, respected and loved in the community.

In fact, neighbors had even made jokes about his high regard for his fellow men. A story had gone around in connection with a most wicked man of the city, who finally had passed away, somewhat to everybody's relief. For he had been widely feared and hated. Ben had been one of the few townspeople who

attended the funeral. After the service, some of his neighbors crowded around Ben, for they had made a wager that he would be unable to think of anything good to say about the man. They purposefully started a conversation about the departed.

"This man…" mouths widened and ears tuned; and then Ben allegedly said, "…had the most beautiful set of teeth I've ever seen in a man's mouth."

I doubted the story and had never asked Ben about it. Besides I remembered hearing a variation of the same anecdote in another city some years back.

"I don't know," Ben continued as we drove along, "but I have the distinct feeling Mothman was trying to tell those boys something. Just what, I don't know."

He continued his thoughts at the restaurant.

"Those two boys. I'd believe them on a stack of bibles. I had both of them in school, and they were really good boys. One of them did at one time get discouraged and decided to drop out, but I talked him out of it. I certainly hope they get some work soon. They're good workers—I've heard that from their former employers."

"You're an educated man," I told him. "You're also a professional magician and probably have studied the history of magic. Surely you've read about the ancient rituals whereby black magicians were said to summon up devils. Do you connect Mothman with such an idea?"

"First of all (and Ben chuckled), I assume you understand that as a stage magician, I perform only white magic— simple feats of illusion to entertain audiences. This is much much different from the black magic of antiquity.

"And I really don't know for sure that the so-called 'black magicians' were as deeply black as they were pictured by our superstitious ancestors. I have a rare old book I'd like you to read sometime, Jules Michelet's Demonology and Witchcraft. I'm afraid our popular conceptions of witches and warlocks, for example, come from Montague Summers, a cleric who wrote and translated several books on the subject, such as The Witch Hammer and A History of Witchcraft. Apparently he was somewhat too credulous and believed everything he heard about the 'black powers'.

"The Michelet work points out that our modern systems of science grew out of the experiments of the 'black magicians'. For instance, I'm sure you know that alchemy, the system which strove to turn base metals into gold, was the father of modern chemistry.

"The witch," he told me, as we drove back toward Point Pleasant, "was probably the first physician. She has been pictured gathering the deadly nightshade, the wings of bats, and other gruesome ingredients to boil in her terrible cauldron. In reality, the things she gathered on the lonely heath were healing herbs, to ease the pain of those who fearfully sought her out. But the public, as it does today when it encounters something it doesn't understand, vilified her, libeled her as an ugly crone, and even burned her at the stake. But her science would not die, as knowledge and truth never really does.

"She would metamorphose into the midwife, and finally she would be remembered only in the woman and in the mother, practicing, to this day, her intuitive magic, as she heals her child's suffering, not with medicines she has gathered, but with a secret little song."

I had never known Ben to speak so eloquently, or with such insight. But the moon suddenly was broken by the giant and ugly hulk of the Silver Bridge we were approaching. Traffic was still rather heavy, and two trailer trucks ahead of us slowed our pace, as we traveled up the incline of the arched structure. The bridge shook and swayed.

"I always tell people that this old bridge is going to go down some day," Ben said: "although I suppose it must be safe or they'd close it. It has a unique suspension structure—there are only two others like it in the world—and it is supposed to give with the weight, I understand. Still, it gives me the creeps when I'm on it in heavy traffic."

I knew I must get up at six the next morning to fulfill an early morning school appointment, though I wasn't sleepy, even at 10:00 p.m., my usual bedtime. I wondered if I were keeping Ben up too late and asked him if he were tired.

"Goodness no. I'm a night owl since retiring from the school business. I got in the habit of staying up to hear the Long John Nebel program on WNBC, New York, which begins at midnight, and it just sort of stuck."

"Let's drive out to that place where the fellow is supposed to have seen a weird flying saucer that looked like a Volkswagon—and whose dog hid under the bed for days after."

"That's a remote area, but let's go. And it's a good excuse to continue our conversation."

We rehashed the interview with the young couples as we drove. We swung off the main road onto a narrow strip of blacktop. I remembered the area vaguely, for I had once driven through it to demonstrate the uses of an overhead

projector to teachers in a small, two-room school.

"You're getting into real back country here," he told me. "We constantly tried to get these people to let us bus the children into town, for the facilities we could give them out here were limited. But these people stick pretty much to themselves and insisted on hanging onto their small community school. It was difficult to get teachers to come out here. It is difficult to get to during the winter, and the people are quite backward and superstitious. At one time they raised quite an outcry because evolution was being taught. I think the school board finally gave in and gave them pretty much what they wanted. Most of the kids quit school once they can legally do so at 16. Goodness knows just what they live on out here. I suppose some of them are on relief, but many of them are fiercely independent and won't accept help. They probably barely subsist from truck farming, or finding occasional and temporary jobs in town."

We drove by one of the dilapidated houses. The frame dwelling had long ago deteriorated almost into a sagging ruin. An old car, propped up on stilts, stood in the yard, with one of the wheels off. From the inside came a dim source of light, probably from an oil lamp. Passing another similar house, I saw a furtive movement at the window, and I thought I could see a small girl peeking out. Coal smoke from a chimney blacked the immediate area.

Around the bend streamed lights from a very small church, with no bell tower, and identified only by its bright white paint and the suggestion of arches in its windows. A few cars were parked outside.

I slowed the car, stopped and regarded the edifice. From inside we could hear a rousing singing. It was an old song I half remembered from my rural childhood:

"O they tell me of a land
    Far beyond the skies;
O they tell me of a home far away…
O they tell me of a land
    Where no storm clouds rise;
O they tell me of an unclouded day!"

"O that land of cloudless skies!
O that land of the unclouded day!
O they tell me of a land
    Where no storm clouds rise;
O they tell me of the unclouded day!"

"Although the song is familiar, within the context of this evening it sounds rather strange," I said; "as if they were singing of another planet—though I suppose they're singing about heaven."

"An unclouded sky likely would be Mars," Ben ventured, seemingly caught up in similar fantasy. "Maybe they're singing about some kind of racial memory—about where they may have come from…"

I turned up the car radio and automatically jabbed at the button which would identify my friends from the Clarksburg radio station. I had got up very early and hoped to make it back home by the time the office opened. John Peters was just finishing the news, and was ready to go into his short "Whistle Stop" segment. I wondered if he had dreamed up another fantasy for today. I really hoped the train would stop again, and that I would hear another imaginative drama.

The train noises grew in the distance, welled into a loud whistling and clanking of wheels. The railroad cars sped by, with a click-click-click as they depressed the rail joints.

"Well," said John, "she went right on by…"

Then he added the climatic touch he had always employed, even before the advent of Mothman.

"…LIKE A BIG FAT BIRD THIS MORNING!"

CHAPTER 5

MR. UNIVERSE

Mr. Universe toiled among the eternal fires. His muscles rippled and glistened with sweat. His handsome countenance reflected the red light from the forges and furnaces, and his demeanor grew almost jolly.

From the fires he withdrew the ball, red hot and smoking. As it cooled, the base metal grew black and ugly.

Then he added a gleaming outer covering.

When it had cooled, he looked at it and saw that his work was good.

As Mr. Universe balanced his golden ball in one muscular hand, he was particularly proud of this accomplishment. This was a concession to his inner nature, a hiatus from routine.

On the outside there raged fires of even greater dimensions, and within them terror, for they were the furnaces of Hell—as beings struggled madly with each other in unconscionable and inexplicable acts of physical and mental violence. Oftimes his physical forges raged and burned to contribute to that diabolic outside scene.

Today, however, he had rebelled at those things he loathed, and forged a golden ball for the children of the world.

CHAPTER 6

THE SEARCHERS

On the evening of Nov. 2, 1966, Woodrow Derenberger was in a good mood. It was just as his boss had told him many times—now it had come true.

"Don't be discouraged, Woody. You're new at selling. There's nothing so bad for a salesman as working for a few days without a sale. But there's also nothing so good for him as making that big sale."

That day Woody Derenberger had struck pay dirt. In his pocket was a signed order for a color TV set, a $500 stereo, and some appliances. The hard sales ground work he had done was beginning to pay off.

Woody had taken the sales job as a temporary measure to support his family, a wife and two children. The plant where he had been a long-term employee had been on strike for six weeks, and his savings were diminishing. Somewhat shy at meeting people, he had experienced misgivings about the job when it was offered; but he had tried unsuccessfully to obtain others. It seemed no employers wanted to take on striking employees, who would work only temporarily until the wage dispute was settled.

The job had been less painful than anticipated. After a few calls he gained confidence, and began to enjoy meeting the people whom he called on, door-to-door.

The fruition of his past three weeks' effort added to his confidence and feelings of well-being. He could hardly resist telephoning his wife before he got home, for she would be happy to hear the good news. She had been encouraging him, day to day.

"I think you're a masterful salesman, Woody," she would tell him. "It just

takes a while to get started.''

As soon as the time payment contracts were bought by the bank he would get the commissions. He would pay off his most urgent bills and then take the family out to dinner.

Derenberger had swung off the local streets of Marietta, onto a short, newly completed section of Interstate 77, which would end at Mineral Wells, south of Parkersburg, where he rented a large, somewhat isolated, two-story farmhouse.

He took the Ford van up to sixty, and noted the 70-miles-per-hour speed limit sign. Making the limit in the van was uncomfortable, for at that speed the imbalanced wheels set up an unpleasant vibration. Besides, it was raining, and visibility was not good. But tonight he felt daring and confident—like a little boy, taking home a good report card. He revved it up to seventy, then to seventy-five, where the vibration stopped.

"They can't get you for five miles over the limit," he told himself. "Anyhow, there's not a car of any kind, let along a cop car, in sight."

Near the exit for Route 47, the road to Glenville, he took some solace in the fact that another driver was more reckless than he. A Ford with the trim removed, about a '52, he would guess, buzzed past him, doing 80 or 90. "Some crazy teenagers," he thought; "next thing they would be trying to scrape them off the road."

Woody let up on his heavy foot. That could have been a cop car instead of a teenager. He had a perfect driving record, and should slow down. Besides, there was another car approaching him from behind, this one strangely without lights, appearing as a dark hulk in the rear view mirror. The police had been cracking down on speeders on the novel, new road, and there had been some talk of "unfair trickery" they had been employing.

Instead of passing, the dark hulk suddenly rose and passed over his van. It descended directly in front of him, its narrow outline turning into a wide, elongated object, blocking both lanes of the Interstate. Woody braked automatically. The thing, whatever it could be, was slowing down!

His first pump at the brake had been instinctive and violent. The tires screeched, and the brakes "led" toward the left lane. As he got the van under control he realized that the object was forcing him to stop, but it Was matching his speed and bringing him to a gradual, safe halt.

The object was now closer and catching the light from his dimmed headlights more fully, and Woody began to take cognizance of its incongruity. It

looked like an old-fashioned globe from an oil lamp, yet with that general shape the resemblance ended. It appeared to be metallic, but in color it was between a dark gray and a black. It was dark and eerie, without the trace of a light. Whatever the thing could be, it was quite enormous, probably 25–30 feet long, occupying completely the two lanes of the road.

By this time the thing had come to a complete halt, though still hovering a few inches above the pavement.

A cold chill gripped at Woody's entire body, as he waited to see what would happen. But as his body adjusted to the heavy secretion of adrenalin, and he began to evaluate his predicament, he suddenly took comfort in the lights of a car approaching from around the bend. Maybe the driver would see what was happening and go for help. But the oncoming driver apparently didn't see or take note of what was taking place in the opposite two lanes. As he rounded the curve, his lights veered and did not catch the huge object in their glare. The driver, doing the limit, displayed no reaction, passed in a rush and sped on down the highway toward Parkersburg and Marietta.

Then a new development took place which would completely change Woody's life. A door, where no opening or markings previously appeared, suddenly opened in the left end of the machine, and a man gingerly stepped out. He walked directly across Woody's headlights, where he had pulled off the road onto the shoulder.

The man was wearing a top coat and appeared to be tall, about 6 feet, Woody estimated. He quickly walked toward the window at Woody's right.

Was it a voice, audibly speaking inside his head? No, it was not like that. Was it some sort of "mental" suggestion to roll down the window? No, not exactly. Woody later would be unable to explain it; he would say he just knew what the man was asking him to do.

But the impression, or "voice", or whatever type of communication reached him was a calming one. Woody remembered, as a child in Sunday school, hearing how God spoke in a "still soft voice". He didn't believe this was God speaking to him, but the idea was reassuring.

He reached shakingly for the crank and rolled down the window. At one position it stuck slightly; Woody remembered this point in the rolling process, and later this would provide him with a point of reference as to his sanity and the reality of the experience.

It was still difficult for him to realize the utter oddness of his situation. Not until later would he connect the visitation with the stories he had heard and

read about flying saucers, to which he had not given much thought, beyond remembering his enjoying reading some of the accounts, though he couldn't believe them. To Woody, it was something like a policeman's stopping him, to check his license, his headlights, or to warn him of danger ahead. Not until later would the full import strike him of the fact that a flying craft, possibly from another world, had passed over his car; and that an otherworldly being had addressed him.

He regarded the strange visitor. Except for the very deep tan, he appeared like most anybody else Woody would see in the course of a day's work. True, this man was incredibly handsome, in a masculine, almost magazine-advertisement way. His dark brown hair was combed straight back in a fashion no local people employed. He was 35–40 years old, and weighed about 160 lbs.

The top coat was unzipped a few inches to disclose a shirt of shiny material, with the top button open and no tie. The shirt was not particularly unusual; the material was similar to that which his wife described as a "hard fabric", though probably somewhat more shiny and glossy.

"Why are you frightened?" the man asked him. "Please do not be frightened. We mean you no harm. We wish you only happiness. I come from a country much less powerful than yours."

At this point Woody fully realized the strangeness of the man's communication. He was talking to him without moving his lips; instead only a friendly, reassuring smile remained on his face.

"You can talk to me two ways," the man continued; "you can say the words you wish to speak to me, or you can merely think of them. I will understand you."

Again the man reassured him that he meant him no harm, only happiness, which in Woody's mind seemed to also mean ecstasy and peace. In fact Woody thought he had substituted the work "happiness" for "peace"—a pattern of term substitution the man would employ throughout the short interview.

Woody noted that several cars were approaching and passing him and his eyes moved toward the vehicle that blocked him. It was no longer there! Leaning forward, however, and looking up through the windshield, he could see that it was hovering above, having lifted off the ground to an altitude of about 75 feet, where, evidently, the dark object would not be readily discovered.

"What is your name?" the man, in the same incomprehensible, still

somewhat disquieting manner, asked him, and Woody told him.

"My name is Cold," the man reciprocated.

As Derenberger would later reflect, he would know that the visitor did not imply that his name suggested something cold, but that it was his real name—like "Smith", "Jones" or "Derenberger".

Cold turned his head toward the lights of the city.

"What is that?" he asked.

He did not point, for his hands were still folded, and at no time did he uncover them during the interview.

"That is the city of Parkersburg," Woody told him.

Cold wanted to know more about it, and Woody described and defined the city the best he could.

"Where I live," Cold replied, "such a place is called a 'gathering'."

Again Cold calmed and reassured the witness:

"Why are you frightened of us? We are the same as you. We eat, we breathe, we sleep, we bleed even as you do. We are like you. Please do not be frightened."

Later Woody would remember that Cold told him twice to look at him closely. He thought that looking at the man may have aided the voiceless exchange, whatever it had been.

The visitor asked him how he occupied himself during the day, not seeming to understand immediately a system of working for a living. Woody tried to explain, told him how he drove the van out each day, demonstrated merchandise, and tried to influence customers to buy it.

"I am a salesman," he tried to communicate.

"Where I live, I am known as a searcher," the man replied soberly, offering no further explanation.

Then Cold abruptly terminated the interview. He stepped back from the car, paused, then added another remark.

"I'll see you again," was his reassuring, but almost disconcerting goodbye.

As he stepped back, Derenberger noted that the craft was rapidly descending, once again to the same spot it had previously occupied on the road. But this time it did not cover the two lanes, having turned endwise. Cold hurried to the vehicle, and as he approached it, the door, now seen in outline, again opened. He stepped quickly inside, and another occupant, darkly outlined, reached out, grasped the door and pulled it shut, with a noise like the sound of a heavy automobile door closing. While the craft hovered it made a

low fluttering noise, something like that of an idling helicopter on the ground.

The craft lifted swiftly into the air and that was the last he saw of it. Derenberger shifted the van into gear and began driving the short distance home to Mineral Wells.

The experience had still not taken the fullest impact upon him. To Woody it still held the suggestion of an ordinary, everyday experience, and he was trying to deal with it in that fashion. But as the signs warning of the end of the completed stretch of interstate appeared, he began to realize that the happening had indeed been most unique, far from the realm of conventional events. As he slowed and prepared to take the exit to Route 21, he remembered a television program he had seen a few weeks earlier.

It was the Joe Pyne show, an interview program featuring guests with odd beliefs and experiences. Woody didn't particularly care for the show's host, for he always seemed to be putting his guests down and browbeating them. His wife loved the program, however, though she constantly criticized Pyne, and said she'd "like to get him by the neck". Still she religiously watched the program and, Woody suspected, secretly found Pyne quite fascinating. It probably was just an act, he reflected, and the host likely was a nice guy when he was off the air. He reflected that his wife also took TV wrestling matches seriously, and couldn't be convinced they were staged.

He thought of Pyne because he had interviewed a man who talked about flying saucers. The puzzling thing to Woody had been the guest's apparent sincerity as he told the wild stories, making them almost believable. The man appeared to be normal, obviously was well educated, but he insisted he had seen people from outer space, and that they had talked to him and had even taken him for a ride in their craft, from California to Venus.

"My God!" he said aloud to himself. "Maybe that man was telling the truth." Maybe Mr. Cold was from space, though he hadn't said as much. During the strange meeting Woody routinely thought that he came from some other country on Earth.

He had laughed heartily at the man on the Pyne show, but his wife tended to take it seriously.

"You can't tell," she told him. "After all, we're shooting rockets into space, and soon we'll go to the moon. We'll go to Mars and Venus eventually. If we can go there, why can't they come here? I'd like to tell that Joe Pyne a thing or two. Oh, how I'd like to wring his neck!"

As he reflected about the show he decided that he would tell her what had

happened. In some ways his experience had been similar to those of the man on TV, and she would probably believe him. He would swear her, however, not to tell the neighbors, or anybody else.

He turned off the highway and up the gravel road to the two-story farmhouse which he rented. As usual, alerted by the sound of the van, the door opened, and there she stood, outlined in the door, making certain it was he. There would be a kiss, and then a good supper.

"I'm lucky," he said to himself, "to have such a good woman." She was much younger than he; Woody had married in his 40's. She could have had any man she wanted in the small suburb where they met, but she had been drawn to him.

"I have a real happy marriage," he thought, and then the two children joined his wife at the door. They would run out to the truck, grabbing and hugging him as he got out.

Yes, he would tell her of his experience, though probably not just then. He suddenly remembered, for the first time since his encounter with Cold, his successful sales of the day. He would begin by relating this to her. His feeling of masculinity, with his young woman, grew, as he grabbed his sales book, tossed his raincoat jauntily across his shoulder, and all smiles, with the children hanging onto him, walked swiftly to her waiting embrace.

Late at night, in bed, he would reflect on his experience. Should he tell other people about it? What would the people of Parkersburg think of him if they knew about it? Could he face them? Would they laugh at him? Did he have the courage like the man on TV, to stand up and tell the truth about what he had experienced?

His wife was also awake. He more sensed than knew this, for she was pretending a deep breathing.

"I know you're awake," he told her, "and I'm troubled. I want to tell about Mr. Cold. I don't mind people laughing at me, but it's you I'm concerned about. What do you think about having a crazy man for a husband?"

"This Mr. Cold," she whispered, without answering his question, "are you certain he said he would be back?"

"I'm positive."

"Do you think he really will be back?"

"I don't know. I hope not. I wouldn't want him to. But I'm afraid that he will."

She grew silent again, and he sensed that this time she had actually

dropped asleep. Woody shifted in bed, turned toward the wall and buried his face in the pillow.

Did he want Cold to come back, or not? Of course not. The visitation had not really been terrifying, but he sensed that it might bring a change into his life, and interruption of the happy existence he now shared with his family. If Cold returned, things surely would never be the same. But there had been that feeling of fascination. He confessed to himself that he had been strangely drawn to this unusual man. He had hoped Cold would approve of him, would perhaps tell him more about his strange craft and possibly invite him inside to look at it more closely.

While his better judgment told him he didn't wish Cold to return, he was quite sure he would see him again. He would ask him exactly where he came from, what he was doing here. Maybe he could get to know this strange visitor better.

CHAPTER 7

THE WINTER WIND

Jimmy Jamison sat up in bed and cautiously opened the window curtain.

The outside scene was one of the same terrifying splendor. The trees on the hilltop, sharply outlined in the bright moonlight, turned into their familiar shapes: faces, dragons, devils, and another kind of thing that had defied conventional terminology. In his arbitrary nomenclature he had called it a "flinderation". It writhed and undulated in the winter wind.

After he stared at the hilltop, his eyes passed, with some relief, to the tall oak tree about a hundred yards from his window. There, five nights previously, the day after he heard about it in school, had perched Mothman, gazing toward his window with blazing hypnotic eyes.

Jimmy liked this house better than the last. He enjoyed the farm and the view from the window, especially the spectral trees—which, when spring came, he fancied, would leaf out, and his familiar friends, the monsters, outlined in the barren trunks and branches, would be gone and dead.

He was supposed to be asleep, for his new parents had imposed a 9:00 bedtime, a part of his rehabilitation, they said. Tomorrow he would go to Sunday school, then sit through a long sermon by his new dad.

Jimmy's last home had been in Parkersburg. He had tried to be a good boy, and his parents there had been kind to him. But an urgent impulse to slip away, and again wander the back streets had overtaken him, and he had opened his bedroom window and escaped. What a sweet, wonderful time it had been! He had talked to a man who had been around the world, who called him "son", and had warned him about the evils of drinking. Slumped in the doorway with

the finally empty bottle, the man became drowsy and ceased to be a companion, collapsing into a sleazy snoring.

"Wake up! Wake up!" Jimmy cried; then, giving up, he ran off among the back streets. A dog took up with him, and they gamboled through the dark alleys. Running onto a main street, chasing an old can Jimmy threw, the dog disappeared under the wheels of a noisy car with older boys in it.

Jimmy ran. The buildings became a blur. Finally, out of breath, he crumpled and sat on the sidewalk and kicked at it. A chunk of the decrepit curb gave way. Jimmy took it in his two hands and weighed it, swinging it back and forth. Then, with all the strength he could muster, he hurled the concrete through the window of the main reception office of the Department of Internal Revenue.

And so it was, off to new parents. He liked the new school in Ripley, especially the counselor, who, as his parents put it, "took a real interest in him and had been out to the house".

He fingered the warm bed clothing, and in the darkness tried to follow the random patterns of the "crazy quilt" which served as a comforter. He dared not turn on the light, for it would reflect outside and they would see it. He hoped he would not start shaking again. When this happened, and he cried, his mother would come into the room and comfort him, but with the adjuration that he was a big boy now and should not be afraid of the dark—which he wasn't anyhow. He loved the darkness, for in it he could think.

It had been as big as Mothman, but not quite like the newspaper accounts the science teacher had read. The red eyes were there, but there were no feathers and he could not believe it to be a bird.

That night, unable to drop asleep at the prescribed time, Jimmy had again taken to fantasizing about the trees. He pulled open the curtain and looked, but instead he had seen the terrible thing.

There, limned in the bright moonlight, and perched on the huge horizontal branch of the oak tree, was a bone-chilling creature. It seemed to grasp the branch with claw-like feet, like an immense, overgrown parakeet. Its head was set low between the apex of a huge set of wings, folded around it. But here the resemblance to a bird ended. Jimmy could see the rough outline of a man's torso. It reminded him of the picture of his real father, who, at one time, had been a carnival performer. His picture showed a handsome young man, with bulging muscles displayed under the tights and blouse of a trapeze artist's costume.

As terrifying, somehow, as its red hypnotic eyes, was its stillness. It didn't move, except to sway up and down with the branch in the winter wind. Jimmy must have stared back at it for some time, for he remembered the darkening and lightening of the creature, as high, fast-moving clouds obscured and revealed the moon.

Jimmy screamed. His parents ran in, and he sobbed out his story to them. His father jerked back the curtain which Jimmy had closed in terror.

"See! You're imagining things. There's nothing out there!" There was strong displeasure in his voice.

"God does not permit such things." And his father sat down, took the bible from the table and read him a passage of scripture about how Jesus had said to suffer the little children to come unto Him. His mother lingered, however, hands on his bed, after her husband departed. She took the bible, which had been roughly thrust into the child's hands, and closed it. She smoothed back his hair which had fallen into his eyes. She bent down and kissed the forehead the mop of hair had hidden, then suddenly departed silently from the room.

Ever since that night Jimmy had lived in the terror that Mothman might return. He was certain that the next time, Mothman would fly to the window, break it open, enfold him in those huge wings, hold him in that inescapable grasp and peck at him with his long, sharp beak.

So each night, before he finally fell asleep, Jimmy had to reassure himself that Mothman was indeed not there, perched upon the horizontal limb, and that only his familiar monsters, and the flinderation, haunted the darkness.

Despite the absence of Mothman, Jimmy pulled the crazy quilt over his head and lay there half-dreaming. By this time his parents had gone to bed, and from the next room he could hear the muffled but recognizable sounds of sex.

They were somewhat like the sounds he had known, made by the stranger, with the greying hair which receded from a balding hairline. They had been whispered, and reassuring, mixed with the smell of foot powder and cologne. A worn, one dollar bill had been the only evidence that, for him, had separated this real experience from fantasy; and he still had it, folded upon fold and hidden where it would never be discovered, in a remote corner of his dilapidated billfold.

Jimmy liked going to sleep, once he could really get started. For the real world dovetailed into one that was unreal; and in that half-lit country he could feel warm forms engulf him and a babble of voices which praised him, lifted him from one to the other as he ran a corridor of smiling, faceless people,

swimming with him through pleasant vapors.

But this half-world departed and again Jimmy was awake. The sounds in the next room had been supplanted by a familiar ritual, a reading of scriptures in the deep voice of his foster father, sometimes responded to by the soft, almost unheard voice of the woman. Tonight these took on a hollow, reverberating, unreal sound.

Again, Jimmy felt he must reassure himself. He moved in bed toward the window, and with a hand trembling, half from the cold of the room, half from fear, jerked back the curtain with a swift, concise movement.

There lay the scene, cold, austere, with the moving shadows of the high, fast-moving clouds. There were the familiar trees on the hilltop. There was the great oak tree with its horizontal limb.

He fixed the limb in his stare, trying to reconstruct just how Mothman had stood, rigidly and motionless on it as it had moved up and down in the winter wind. He tried to envision just how tall the creature had been, and how long it had stared at him. Without closing the curtain, Jimmy fell back from his sitting position and turned onto his stomach, kicking at the mattress with wildly flaying feet.

"Mothman!

"Please come back, Mothman!

"Mothman! Mothman! I love you, Mothman!"

CHAPTER 8

THE MAN WITH THE BEARD

‘Ah- Mr. Flame—there you are at last!”

The phone had been ringing for some time, and my key had stuck in the door as I tried to get inside to answer. I was just returning from out of town, and tripped over a box of books while reaching the phone.

“No, Jim,” I countered; “this is Mr. Tailfeather and I just went for a tailspin getting here before you would hang up.”

Of course I knew that James W. Moseley was exercising his usual sense of humor. He probably was calling up to hear what I had found out about the latest Mothman cases, in which he was deeply interested. Jim, then the editor of Saucer News, earlier had made a joke, terming my interest in Mothman as similar to the fable, The Moth and the Flame. Lately he had been addressing me as “Mr. Flame.”

“I’m calling,” he continued, “because there’s a man coming down there to see you. Don’t get me wrong. He’s one hell of a fine fellow, and you’ll enjoy talking with him. Still, however, he says he’s new to UFO research and would like to ask you some questions. One odd thing, however, is that despite his newness in the field, he knows too much about it—as much as you or I, and possibly even more.”

“Who is he, anyhow.”

“John Keel. You likely have heard of him.”

“Yes, you mentioned him last week when I talked to you from Point Pleasant.”

Then I thought of a book I had read about six months previously.

"Now I place him," I told Jim. "I read a book of his, one heck of a book which Randy Parks recommended to me. In fact I couldn't get rid of the thing until I finished it, and as a result of staying up the most of the night I missed two appointments the next day. I forget the title—some sort of strange name."

"Jadoo is the title. I haven't read it but I intend to."

I recalled the strange, compelling volume. Keel had spent a great deal of time in the Middle East, with the intention of exposing many of the miracles claimed by mystics and holy men there. He did expose some of them, but also encountered many mysteries he couldn't fathom. Not only had the events been fascinating, but they had been described by a fluency of writing style that could come only from a highly talented author.

"Maybe Keel's just a better researcher than we and has covered a lot of ground in a short time," I said, referring to his apparent wide knowledge of the UFO field.

"That's entirely possible. But maybe it's just the general aura of mystery he carries with him. He has a full, black beard, and a very striking general appearance. Or, maybe it's because he gives you the impression of not only knowing as much as we about Flying Saucers—but actually knowing a lot more —a lot that he is not telling."

Some beeping sounds and then a series of clicks temporarily interrupted our conversation.

"There's The Silence Group again," I joked; then I told him, in an exaggerated manner, that I had just discovered the "secret" to the Saucer Mystery and planned to announce it the next day. I also threw in details about some bridges I planned to blow up.

"You shouldn't bait the Men In Black in such a cavalier manner," Jim warned with mock seriousness.

I knew that, despite our kidding, Jim, as I did, took some of the new cases involving threats by strange visitors very seriously. He had long been plagued by threatening telephone calls, and by annoying noises on the line. I had been receiving similar calls, but privately felt that if I expressed fear, the situation might get worse. So I had bugged the callers by giving them some funny business, and laughing into their ears. The calls had decreased in frequency.

As Jim hung up and I was replacing the receiver I heard a deep, baritone voice on the line.

"Hello! Hello! Gray Barker?"

I put the receiver back to my ear and answered.

"This is John Keel. Say, are you psychic? You answered the phone before it rang!"

I explained that I had just finished a call and that his must have come through just as the other party hung up.

"You must be psychic, too, John. I was just talking about you, with Jim Moseley."

After some pleasantries, John explained that he would like to interview Woodrow Derenberger. He would be in the Parkersburg area the following weekend, and needed directions to the home of the now famous contactee. Also, he would like to meet me on the trip. I suggested that we meet in Parkersburg the following Saturday.

Keel was out of his room at the Green Acres Motel, so I walked to the adjoining Seddon's Restaurant to look for him. From Moseley's description, there was no doubt about the identity of the man sitting at a corner table. He had a copious black beard and was, I could see immediately, a ruggedly handsome man. He was dressed in a corduroy hunting jacket, and gave the appearance of being long and lean with a pronounced "writer's stoop" from years bent over a typewriter. He was having coffee and poring over the local newspapers. Later I learned that, like many writers, he was a night person and usually had breakfast around 3 or 4 in the afternoon.

As I approached, he looked up at me with intently piercing eyes, which changed to pleasantness when his face broke into a warm smile. We shook hands.

"I see you're not wearing your black suit today," he chided, and I knew I immediately liked Keel. Unlike many UFO investigators, he had a good sense of humor.

As I had dinner and he finished his afternoon breakfast, I felt out his knowledge of the UFO field, and like Moseley, was impressed. I asked him point blank how he had learned so much in so little time.

"Simple," he explained. "I employed a particular discipline that not too many people have. I simply read practically every UFO book ever published—and you, as an editor and publisher, know that's pretty rough medicine. Some of the dullest stuff in the literary world appears between covers with brightly colored saucers on them."

"I know what you mean," I agreed. "Unfortunately I have to read them before I publish them."

We swung off Route 50 a hundred yards from the restaurant, onto the short,

newly-completed section of Interstate 79. Since I had arrived, a cold drizzle had set in. I told Keel it was the same kind of night during which Derenberger had allegedly experienced his initial contact.

"That in itself is odd," he told me. "I suppose you've noticed that only a small percentage of sightings take place during rain or snow."

I confessed that I had not thought about this.

"Here's another item for your ufological mill. This involves only one year, 1966, the only one I have been able to tabulate so far. Out of roughly 700 sightings I have analyzed for that year, 20% of them took place on Wednesdays, for some incomprehensible reason. Thursday was the next best day to see a saucer, with around 17%. I consider 700 to be a large enough sampling to make these figures meaningful."

Those two facts, though puzzling, impressed me further about Keel: they showed that he was not just a mere UFO buff, or professional writer—apparently he had conducted laborious statistical research.

"You'll find Derenberger an affable, hospitable man," I told him. "You can still be skeptical, but if you demonstrate that you have an open mind, he'll answer most any question you put to him."

"Well, I do have a lot of credentials," he remarked, flourishing a leather folder which contained letters from several leading magazines, including True, Playboy, Saga, Science Digest, all verifying that he was working on UFO assignments for them. He also had a wallet filled with official press cards. I glanced through these "credentials", impressed.

"What?" I grinned. "No NICAP card?"

"I don't get abong very well with NICAP," Keel confessed. "I've met Major Keyhoe several times but he frowns on my interest in the contactee aspects. It's interesting that most of the professional writers and reporters I've talked with claim that they've had better cooperation from the Air Force than from NICAP. Some of them bypass NICAP altogether and deal mainly with the Air Force. Others, like the New York Journal-Americaan reporter who investigated the Michigan flap, have hinted darkly that they are very suspicious of NICAP's real motives in all of this."

"It's just as well," I said. "Waving a NICAP card at Derenberger is like waving a red flag in front of a bull."

I presaged my explanation by pointing out that the Pittsburgh sub-committee of NICAP (National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena) was not necessarily typical of the UFO club as a whole, though it

was the official investigation arm for the area.

Members of the NICAP team made contact with Woody shortly after his story got on the news wires. They immediately stressed that he shouldn't tell his story to any other group. Fortunately I had been able to reach him and warn him beforehand about them.

The investigators first subjected him to what he termed "the third degree", and insisted that one of the group, either a professional or stage hypnotist, be allowed to put him into a trance so that he would have "complete recall". Woody, who had once, when a youngster, participated in such an experiment, could not be hypnotized and was told by the performer that he was "not a good subject".

Next, one of the group suggested that he take a written psychological test, supervised by a local psychiatrist. Woody hastily agreed, but with the stipulation that all members of the NICAP team take the same test at the same time, under the same controls. The group quickly reneged, and soon retreated, but with another adjuration not to give information to any rival group.

Derenberger's initial annoyance with the visitors was aggravated when a local member of the organization managed to obtain his unlisted telephone number and persisted in calling him night after night, always inquiring if he had talked with other UFO investigators.

(Later Derenberger would voluntarily retain the services of a well-known Parkersburg psychiatrist, who would give him clinical psychological tests. Although the reports were privileged by medical ethics, the doctor did state in an on-the-air telephone conversation on the Long John Nebel Show, over WNBC, New York, that he had found the subject to be sane and with no obvious neuroses.)

I slowed the Ford Wagon as the section of completed interstate highway ended. We pulled onto U.S. 21, then took a left on a side road which would lead us to Derenberger's home. The cold drizzle had stopped and the sky was clearing. I saw the inviting lights from Woody's large, two-story farmhouse beckoning from a rise in the terrain.

We swung off onto the graveled driveway, then slowed to a creep as we inched our way between two lines of cars, parked on both side of the narrow strip. People were sitting silently in the vehicles, appearing only as dark forms. Some of them quickly turned their faces from us and some seemed to huddle lower. Taken within the context of the evening, their immobility and silence produced an unreal effect—as if they represented scores of window

dummies in darkened stores at midnight.

Only one such vehicle displayed signs of animation. A gaunt shadow of a man in a station wagon apparently filled with electronic gear seemed to twist knobs on a blue illuminated dial, probably a stero tape player. Faint strains of weird music (I thought I recognized Danse Macabre) emanated from the vehicle.

"Although some of the press and a lot of people around here have given me a bad time and called me everything from a nut to a bunco artist," our host remarked, "I think those cars out there will testify that some people take this seriously."

Woody explained that after some Parkersburg residents had reported seeing a low-flying UFO near his house, people came there every night, hoping the saucer would return. They didn't annoy him greatly, however, for they usually sat quietly in their cars without bothering him or his family.

He was disturbed, though, by a few of the visitors, who had been seen with rifles in their cars.

"I must warn you of one thing," he adjured. "I know you'll want to get out and look around, but I wouldn't stray into the woods if I were you. A few people hide out there with guns, and I suppose they would shoot at the space people if they appeared. Naturally Indrid Cold and the others know of this, and just don't come around when there is danger."

"Indrid Cold?" I asked. "You never did mention a first name in your reports! You referred to the space man only as Mr. Cold."

As Keel's mouth opened in amazement and as I dove for a notepad in my briefcase, Derenberger began to unfold a tale almost unique, even in the fantastic lexicon of saucer contact stories.

One night late in December, 1966, he had come home much later than usual. The usual watchers had gone home, and he was locking his Ford Econovan when he saw two figures standing near his car.

"Do not be frightened," one of them assured him telepathically. "I am Indrid Cold and this is my panion, Carl Ardo (in their many conversations, Cold spoke of Ardo, obviously an outer-space form of co-pilot, as his 'panion'.)"

They told him they came from a planet called Lanulus, 30 light years away, near the constellation Ganymede. Lanulus was very much like Earth, except its people never had wars, and during the summer they wore no clothing. Due to their skills at mental telepathy, they had no secrets between one another, and

that was the reason for their peaceful existence, Derenberger believed.

Cold had a wife, Kimi; two other crewmen were named Tonni and Daryl. During one contact Cold was accompanied by a man named Clinnel, from the planet Cerenabus, and a woman, Elvaine Kletaw.

During later visits Cold and his "panions" accepted his hospitality and came inside his house, sampled his Earth food and complained that it tasted "bland". When Derenberger complained of ulcers, Cold gave him medicine which completely cured him. After several preliminary contacts, the spacemen took him aboard their craft, and flew him to a mother ship which crossed the vast distances to their planet, apparently in minutes, and set him down for a visit. The people of Lanulus, however, appeared apprehensive and even fearful of the Earth visitor, until Cold and Ardo convinced Derenberger he should remove his clothing so he would appear more like them. After he agreed, the people accepted him more warmly.

"Have you had any visits lately, say in the past week or so?" John queried.

Derenberger answered in the negative, but did feel that one or more of the ships was in the general area at that time.

"When they are near I can contact them mentally. I can't promise anything, but if it's at all possible, I'll concentrate and ask him to appear."

I could detect a look of obvious skepticism on John's countenance, and I, myself, suspected that Derenberger would get out of this one by saying he could not make mental contact that particular night. He excused himself and left us, while we talked to Mrs. Derenberger and some neighbors who claimed to have seen the ship land (though they had not been close to the occupants). After some time, possibly a quarter hour, Woody quietly rejoined the group, smiled and told us, "I can't promise it, but I believe that if you'll come out into the yard you will see something very unusual."

He invited us to look closely toward the end of a long valley. Gradually we could make out twinkling lights.

"Let's walk down that way," John suggested.

At closer proximity, and with the further clearing of the atmosphere, it became obvious that the lights were not the heralds of some otherworldly visitation, but quite mundane torches of Terra: lights from the nearby city.

I think that John, as I, was somewhat disappointed; for despite our zeal for objectivity, I believe the both of us at that moment would have liked to have proved Derenberger's claim.

Suddenly John's dejection was interrupted by surprise.

"Look up there!" he cried.

Moving up a ridge, in front of us and at the right of the valley, was a series of blinking lights.

"Let's go up there!" he urged.

We took off across the field, but were temporarily delayed by a wire fence. John reached it first and started to throw his long legs over it. Suddenly he let out a yelp and sailed over the fence, sprawling headlong in a big mud puddle on the other side.

"Don't touch it!" he yelled as he struggled to his feet. "It's an electric fence!"

"Are you hurt?" I asked, backing away from the fence.

"Just a little soggy," he grunted, brushing at the mud that covered him from head to foot. He looked around uneasily. "Well, as long as I'm here I might as well check out those lights."

He started off alone into the darkness, rapidly disappearing up the ridge. A moment later Woody and his friends joined me.

"He shouldn't go up there alone," Woody said worriedly. "There's a bull in that field."

"I'm glad you got here when you did," I groaned, thinking that I had almost joined Keel. We could occasionally see glints of his flashlight as we worked his way up the hill. The rest of us clustered around the fence and waited. Off in the darkness we heard some animal-like snorts, and the sounds of cattle lowing and hoofs trotting across the soggy turf. The flashlight flickered on and off.

An eternity seemed to pass before Keel's tall, stooped outline reappeared. He glared at Woody across the fence.

"You neglected to mention there's a bull out there," he said. It turned out that Keel had been reared on a farm near Perry, N.Y., and that he had later lived for two years in Spain where he had attended many bullfights. He knew that it was a serious mistake to run from a bull. So he stood his ground when the animal appeared, flashing his light directly into its eyes. The gambit worked. The bull stopped a few feet away from him and the two glared at each other. Keel said he slowly walked toward the animal, rather than away from it, went past and headed slowly for the fence again. The bull followed at a respectable distance. Keel jumped over the fence and rejoined us.

At least some of the lights appeared to be coming from a distant highway on the other side of the valley, he reported, and were auto headlights flickering through the trees along the top of the ridge. This did not explain the small lights

that seemed to be directly in the field, though, he admitted. He also wondered if maybe the cattle weren't the shadowy forms we had seen earlier.

We returned to the house, but still stood outside looking for more lights. Suddenly I pointed at the sky. Derenberger either had a lot of luck going for him that night, or some weird otherworldly matters were truly transpiring. A large red globe, half the apparent size of a full moon, appeared. It would fade in, then vanish, fade in again and out. By that time, however, the haze was moving back in, and no doubt this represented some bright planet or star, distorted by the atmosphere.

I believed John was quite skeptical of the additions to Derenberger's original story, although, like myself, he probably viewed the initial contact account with an open mind. As we drove back to the motel, I hesitated to ask his opinion, for I didn't want to pin him down. Besides, he had lapsed into a silence and probably was thinking out the whole affair.

However, I couldn't help bring up an odd part of the story.

"I don't think you buy it, John, but there are little things that make you wonder. For instance that strange little detail of the ordinary bunk beds that he saw on board the craft. And the "CB"-type radio he described as being used by the space men. These were things Woody has often seen right here on Earth. Now if he were making up a science fiction story, surely he could dream up some weirder gadgetry to go with it."

John didn't answer, as if he were still deeply wrapped in thought. I took my eyes off the road momentarily to glance at him. His eyes were turned straight ahead, and, as if noting I had seen the look on his face, he turned his head quickly, completely away from me. I had seen his expression for only a brief instant, and distinctly thought that I saw a look of terror on his countenance.

By that time we were back at the motel, and John was once again his normal self. As we had coffee, he began at last to speak.

"If the basic story the witness tells is substantially true, that wouldn't worry me too much—except, possibly, a disappointment at the lack of intelligence Indrid Cold and his ilk demonstrate. After all, they mean us no harm, are all sweetness and light, and so on. Of course, if the witness is simply trying to make up a good story he wants to sell, that's no great worry either, except for a black mark on the world's literary history."

He grew silent again, and I chuckled at his sardonic remark. Then I tried to decipher what he was getting at.

"John, level with me. There is something, somewhere in Derenberger's story that shakes you up, isn't there?"

"Not exactly. But I think you're on the right track when you mention the somewhat glaring inconsistencies, such as the 'CB' radio and the bunk beds, apparently Earth made. I think it would be most disturbing, however, if, say the contacts had been real, but that Indrid Cold, or whoever he actually was, had been deliberately lying to Woody."

We finished the coffee. I was tired, and I could see that he was feeling the results of his long trip. I should take leave of him and let him get some rest.

But I decided to take the ufological bull by the horns and bring up the remark that Jim had made.

"Frankly, John," I began, "Jim and I had a long talk about you. He had one impression about you which I also get. I somehow feel you have some theories or some information you're holding out on all of us. Now I presume you're writing a book, and I probably will write one too about the Mothman cases and all the incredible Ohio valley incidents. I know if you have something really new and fresh, you wouldn't want to blow it in front of some other writer or editor…"

"I am writing a book, which I am tentatively calling Operation Trojan Horse, but that isn't the real reason I don't reveal everything. If that were the reason, I would tell you everything, because I know you're ethical.

"Believe me, Gray, something fantastic is going on. Something that not even the hardcore UFO buffs are ready to believe. You've been in this crazy business for years and you know that there are many wild and unpublicized aspects of this thing. Things which simply do not support the whole extraterrestrial idea.

"When I first started digging into this I realized that there were no real 'hard facts' or genuine evidence. The whole extraterrestrial idea was built up by wishful thinkers on speculation and circumstantial evidence. There are hundreds of bits and pieces that just don't fit that idea. Once I understood this, I tried to find a broader concept into which all the pieces could be fitted. So I had to literally start from scratch and work out some radical new methods for investigating these things.

"I've given up all of my other work and have been spending my full time on this. I've been going into debt and it hasn't been easy but it's about time that somebody really attacked this mystery from every angle. I think I've got the key now, but it is going to take a lot of hard work to prove anything. In the

meantime, I have to keep a lot of my findings quiet. First of all, not many people are willing to believe it. Secondly, if I reveal some of these things prematurely a lot of crackpots and screwballs will tailor their own stories to fit my findings. I've discovered that there are many small, seemingly insignificant details in stories from all over the world which actually correlate and corroborate each other. I'm more interested in these little details than in the endless descriptions of funny flying objects.

"Frankly, I've concluded that the objects really aren't very important to all of this. There are other factors which are far more important. Those are the factors I'm digging out and documenting and, when the time comes, I'll be revealing these things in very small doses."

He paused and lit the pipe which was nearly always dangling from his mouth.

"There are a great many contradictions," I admitted, "but how can one man ever put the whole puzzle together?"

"That's the problem, Gray." He puffed thoughtfully. "I suspect that the UFO buffs and many of the serious researchers like yourself have allowed themselves to be misled and diverted by the controversies and nonsense surrounding this subject. They've worked harder at fighting the Air Force than at investigating UFOs. Groups like NICAP have dedicated themselves to compiling anecdotes rather than facts. They've smothered themselves with what seems like a hopeless cause—trying to prove that UFOs not only exist, but that they come from outer space. You'd think that after twenty years of vain effort they would come to realize that the outer space answer is either partially or is completely erroneous. It's impossible to prove, and very little observational data supports it."

"But if they aren't from outer space, where could they be from?" I pressed, intrigued.

"That's the sticky part," he continued. "They seem to be environmental, yet under intelligent control. I've done a lot of historical research and discovered that these things were as numerous in 1866 as they were in 1966. In fact, a man named William Denton in Massachusetts claimed a contactee experience very similar to Derenberger's back in 1866. He wrote several books about it."

"What do you mean by 'environmental', though?"

"I mean that they seem to have always been here—that they co-exist with us somehow. Remember, in the bible the prophet Zechariah recounts a conversation with an 'angel', and describes seeing a 'flying roll'. The angel

pointed it out to him and told him, 'That is the curse that goeth forth over the whole Earth.' That curse is still with us, Gray."

It was not a new idea, of course, but Keel seemed to be able to articulate it in remarkably convincing terms. His research was impressive and much of it was certainly unique. I could see that he was looking at the subject from a broad, overall viewpoint rather than concentrating on random lights-in-the-sky as so many other researchers were doing. He spoke knowledgeably of human history and the apparent role UFOs had played in mythology and legend in all civilizations.

"But the thing that is really beginning to bother me, Gray," he continued soberly, "is that I'm developing a gnawing suspicion that the Air Force has been right all along—and has been telling us part of the truth all along. After all, they've always claimed that there was no evidence of extraterrestrial origin, and so on. If I jumped into print with this kind of conclusion, all the buffs would scream that I've been 'silenced' or 'bought off' or some such nonsense. But I've got to admit that the Air Force's position makes more sense to me every day. Maybe the government has always realized that the 'truth' can't be proven, and that few people would believe it anyway. So they've done the only thing they could do: they've tried to play the whole thing down and dismiss it. If UFOs were around in Zechariah's time, and in 1866, they'll probably be around in 2066, too—and be just as aloof of us as they've always been. The UFO buffs keep waiting for them to land on the White House lawn. I don't think that's ever going to happen. Instead, people like Zechariah, Denton and Derenberger will continue to undergo wild experiences which can't be proven and which few people will want to believe. And guys like you and I will spend our lives running around trying to find all the pieces to a puzzle which doesn't seem to have any definite shape or borders."

I regretted that the intriguing conversation was ending as we paid the check. I yawned, looked at my watch and only then realized how late it was.

"If your ideas are valid, John," I added jokingly, "don't be surprised if there's a knocking at your door tonight and three men in black attack you with a billy club."

"I can't be bothered. That bull wore me out." He grinned. "If the M.I.B.* show up, I'll send them over to your room."

***M.I.B.: An abbreviation employed by Keel for "Men In Black", yet also used by him in a wider context to denote many different forms of interference with UFO witnesses and researchers. For instance, Keel reports that mysterious people who attempt to silence UFO**

witnesses are not always dressed in black suits. Some, for example, have impersonated U.S. Air Force officers. See also Chapter 10.—G.B.

CHAPTER 9

THE GOLDEN BALL

In Ripley, Janet Svenson performed her final duty of the afternoon as she witnessed the closing and locking of the heavy bank vault door. Mr. Willett performed the short operation with what seemed to be an even greater ceremony and preciseness than usual. Perhaps it was because of the unusual and intriguing object resting inside.

John W. White brought the object to the bank shortly before closing time, and with it an even more unusual story.

On the night that Woodrow Derenberger first met Indrid Cold, the small city of Ripley, located about 30 miles south of Parkersburg, had its own visitation of unidentified flying objects. Although the sightings were unspectacular and consisted only of strange lights in the sky, White, a resident in the vicinity of Cedar Lakes Drive, believed the saucers had left a highly valuable calling card.

White handed the heavy object to Janet's boss. It gleamed and sparkled under the fluorescent lights. Two of his children had found it and carried it into the house. He believed it had dropped from one of the unidentified objects. To have fallen from such great height, it was remarkably undamaged—in fact it was completely undented. He believed it had struck the branches of a tree, which broke its fall.

He inspected it closely. It was apparently made of high quality gold! It measured 12 inches in circumference, or just a fraction under that.

After the ball was safely placed in the bank vault, White confided additional information to Mr. Willett and his secretary. He had taken it to

Charleston, the state capital, from which he had just returned.

"I took it to three jewlers and dealers in gold. They analyzed it and all of them said the three-eighths-inch outer coating is 24 karat gold."

But there the mystery only began. When heated to 1260 degrees, the ball turned red hot, but as it cooled it returned to its natural color. One jewler ruined three drilling bits when he tried to penetrate the inner metal.

"Tests showed," he added, "that the inner portion is definitely magnetic. The outer coating is not, however."

Nobody had challenged his ownership so far, and he figured that the ball belonged to him by the rule of finders keepers. He hoped to get in touch with some metallurgical experts who could determine the composition of the center. It also probably was composed of some rare and valuable metal.

Mr. White's account of the strange lights and the falling of the golden ball brought back to Janet's memory an unusual experience she had rarely thought of for several years. She was only five when it occurred, and her mother termed it childish imagination. Yet the event remained in her mind with a vividness far more pronounced than many other of her childhood experiences.

It happened in Norway in 1930, two years before her parents emigrated to the United States. She was returning from a neighbor's house after dark, and had to cross a wide field in the course of the quarter mile distance.

She dreaded this part of her walk, for from that vantage point the old graveyard at the top of the hill to the left of her home was in view. Her two brothers once declared they saw moving lights in the cemetery, and one of them had floated out of the small burial grounds and part of the way down the hill toward them, giving them quite a fright. She feared she also might see the lights.

She turned her eyes to the ground and the moonlit path, determined not to look. Then from behind her, and seemingly from far away, came a low chanting. It had an unfamiliar rhythm which afterward she could never reconstruct in her mind—although she had often tried to remember it. It fascinated her, and she stopped walking, somehow unafraid, to look for its source.

From the shadows of the woods emerged something incomprehensible. At that distance it appeared as an enormous moving gray mass. It was approaching her rapidly, and the chanting was becoming louder. Not even then did she have an impulse to flee. She was drawn, ecstatically, to the approaching thing, which appeared larger, almost as huge as the mountain it had emerged from.

She must have been hypnotized, she later reasoned, by the strange voices.

Now the mass was almost upon her, and she discerned it was composed of thousands of giant beings of inexplicable character. At first they seemed to be moving, up and down, over and under, like horses on a merry-go-round; but as they advanced she realized their movements were more complex than that. Although they moved upward and downward, they did so as if they were in an almost infinite variety of circular orbits, changing these orbits as they went. Some of them almost touched the ground, at their lowest points, while others moved high above her. They moved relentlessly, with the precision of clockwork, as if they were attached to a vast complex of shuttles and eccentric wheels within wheels.

The cloud of beings was now enveloping and passing her. Although they did not touch her, as they moved all around and over her, she sensed they were not material creatures. They were pale gray, and looked more like statues than living things. Later they would remind her of the exaggerated elongation and stylization in painting and sculpture of the Middle Ages. They wore page boy-style haircuts, though she could not tell if they were men or women. Their faces, though benign in appearance, were completely emotionless. They had long robes, which again, like statuary, did not flow or move.

Only the beings which swung low in their orbits, close enough for her to touch them, displayed any irregularity from the rest of the monotonous progression. These held out clenched, inverted hands toward her, as if offering presents. In her fascination and lack of fear, she extended her open hands to receive what was apparently offered; however as each hand opened mechanically just above hers, nothing dropped from it. This imaginary, inexplicable presentation continued, along with the complex movement of the vast cloud of beings, for what seemed to be five or ten minutes, all the time accompanied by the chanting from some unseen source: for the lips of the beings were cold and immobile, as if carved from stone.

Finally, the procession had passed; and it receded, just as it had arrived, turning back into the undefinable mass and moving across the mountain at the other side of the valley. As it departed the chanting dimmed, and only when she could no longer hear it did she move toward home. Still she was not frightened, and walked the rest of the distance home at her normal pace.

For months afterward she would dream she heard the chanting. She would awaken, and for a few brief moments she could remember the rhythm. Then it would escape her, and she would listen for it again. She would close her eyes

and hope to dream again about it.

Janet wanted one more look at the golden ball before Mr. Willett closed the heavy vault door. She walked in front of the circular opening. There it was, in the corner, resting on a shelf, still glowing, even in the dim interior of the vault.

She hoped Mr. White would not call for and remove it the next day, for she would like the opportunity to hold and examine it again, as she had done briefly when he handed it to her earlier that afternoon. As she had carefully supported it with both hands, a feeling of perfect calm had come over her. It must, indeed, have come from outer space—there was something undefinable about it that declared it was of another world.

But she feared what he probably would do with the ball. Mr. Willett had remarked that White's discovery of the object would no doubt make him a wealthy man. Its metallic value probably was fantastic, and that would be multiplied many times by its value as a wealthy collector's item, museum piece, or if it were purchased by the government.

If it were her's she would not sell it. It would be a too beautiful, too sacred thing to part with.

Perhaps he would leave it in the bank vault for a few days. Perhaps she could hold it again. Or just look at it occasionally, as it rested there.

CHAPTER 10

INDRID COLD

Indrid Cold adjusted his flying cap and held up the reflector. A greatly enlarged version of himself startled him; then he turned the shaving mirror and looked into the normal side. The cap gave him a jaunty appearance. It had appeared, as had so many other things, quite suddenly inside the chest of utility.

He glanced at his panion, Carl Ardo, for approval, but he was busy at working the controls.

"How about taking 'er down into a tailspin?" he suggested.

Carl looked up.

"I'm in for it. Hold on, and we'll try it again!"

Carl was in extraordinarily good spirits, probably because of the brand-new uniforms they had suddenly been gifted with, just an hour or so before the appearance of the flying caps. These were indeed more comfortable than the shiny, metallic garb they had discarded, and even more so than when they had worn no clothing at all. They had been so cold then.

Other changes in the spaceship had been for the better: The ancient CB radio set, which really had no function other than to squeal, had been replaced with shiny new gear, with a bright, wide silver screen, on which entertaining and rapidly dissolving scenes appeared. They displayed what clearly must be other worlds, with fantastic cities, wild, everchanging colors, and happy people, smiling and exhibiting their beautiful nude bodies. Indrid speculated why he had been so uncomfortable before he had received his first clothing. Perhaps it had something to do with the atmosphere of this planet.

Other improvements were still needed, however. The spaceship could be

larger and roomier, and better control was desired, particularly in rough air, where it bounced uncomfortably, once having thrown Carl and him against the ceiling and bloodied his nose—that had rapidly, almost magically healed, however.

And the old-fashioned, overstuffed sofa was still there. It was anachronistic with the modern design of the spaceship. But these flaws were minor, and their craft probably would make drivers of other spaceships green with envy—if, indeed, there were other such ships (Indrid had not seen any of them yet). Surely he and Carl could not be the only drivers gamboling in the air envelope of this planet.

Other improvements no doubt would come shortly. He hoped the Interpreter would improve the one wall, obviously hurriedly built to complete the spaceship. It consisted of rough clapboards, probably torn from some long unpainted house. And he should appreciate the shining pair of seat belts which had appeared at about the time they received the flying caps. These would prevent future bloody noses, though he noted that Carl had unfastened his, preferring not to use them. When the wall was refurbished, Indrid hoped it would be replaced by a large screen, like the smaller one, so that he could look at the happy people and see them in better detail.

The other wall, if not refurbished soon, could conceivably break. For it had a cloudy and indistinct appearance, and was becoming transparent. Even now, Indrid could see through it darkly, watch the surface of the planet pass by, somewhat out of focus. The outlines of the rivers, the counties and the states, could be seen more clearly than yesterday, and he could almost make out the name of the town, Parkersburg, which, of course, showed up perfectly clear on their guiding light screen. As they would descend, those outlines would dovetail into bridges, rivers, cities and houses. They had sometimes flown close, and enjoyed seeing the culture units at work and play. Indrid wished he could fly even closer, and even land and talk to these people—but the Interpreter had imposed certain limits.

Perhaps he could make friends with these culture units, who did not want to be friendly with him. It had been said by the Interpreter that if they flew too close, and attempted to wave and smile at them, these creatures would turn dischargers on them (“large guns”—that had been the term, and not “dischargers”) and wound them. He was certain the Interpreter was correct about this, but still he was sad about it, and thought that not all of the culture units would do this.

Indrid wondered if he would die if these units really turned these dischargers toward them. This might be strange and fascinating—dying. These creatures would lift your body with love, and would bear it in great ceremony, and speak of you kindly; and there would be vibrations of high and low frequencies.

Dying would be interesting, even fun, for you could watch what they did with you. And they would remember you, and build memorials to you, and you would go on flying, darting and gamboling, in the memories of these creatures.

But with those who displeased the Interpreter, he had been told it was another matter. These unfortunate drivers simply vanished, without trace, and nobody built memorials to them; nobody remembered nor loved them. Or sometimes they were just transformed, their shiny uniforms stripped from them, and there being substituted suits of dark mourning. They were forever bound to Earth, condemned to walk in sidewise motion, to be feared, to be unloved.

Indrid had once listened raptly, as the Interpreter, in a talkative mood, had told him of the people who moved among the stars, who explored the universe, wandering among a trillion suns, never visiting the same place twice in the everquest for new things. The Interpreter had shown some of these places on the screen, and Indrid was very thankful to him for doing this.

Carl probably never thought of these things. He was methodical, and he sat there, constantly turning and adjusting the controls, and saying messages into the volume box.

Indrid would like to be free, to fly to these outer climes; but of course there were the silver cables, tied to his hands and feet, also similarly to Carl's body, and to the spaceship itself. Through the walls of the spaceship, they stretched downward, sometimes hanging loosely in great arcs, sometimes taunt. The attachments did not seem to bother Carl.

These silver cables were the impediment, he felt, which separated him from the lush scenes on the screen. He could take one of the wire cutters and disengage them, but that would no doubt displease the Interpreter.

There was a tug on one of the cables or cords. Indrid looked at the horizon and saw there the huge emotionless smiling face, with the orange triangles of fire surrounding it.

It reminded him that dawn had broken and that they would have to descend, and hide out, until another sundown.

CHAPTER 11

TAD JONES

North of Charleston, W.Va., Route 60 was cloaked in a double pall. As I drove through South Charleston which, oddly but true, is actually located North of the main city, the cold intermittent rain, coupled with the smog of the great chemical-industral complex, made visibility difficult, even at 4:00 P.M. I turned off 60 and crept along with other traffic on mud-stained secondary and temporary roads, hoping how soon I might reach Institute, my destination.

Stretching above, to my right, were the slaughtered hillsides, whose gaping, muddy wounds displayed the first ravages of the approaching interstate highway. inching its way toward the city, with the angry roaring of heavy bulldozers giving the impression of a vast unsatiated monster. As it advanced in its slow but irresistible assault it forced detours and snarled traffic.

But when the great new road was finished, it would contrast sharply with the decaying local streets and crowded thoroughfares that served the chemical metropolis and had long ago become inadequate for the burgeoning population and traffic.

I had been doing taped interviews with Hugh McPherson, of WTIP in Charleston, when he had given me the lead I wanted on a dramatic UFO sighting, involving an otherworldly vehicle which belied its sophistication by resting on old-fashioned airplane landing gear.

“I suppose you know that Tad Jones has disappeared, bag and baggage,” he told me off the air, and I replied in the negative.

“I know someone who can give you a good line on this. He was a close friend of Jones and he has also experienced some weird sightings himself. And

he's no crackpot. His name is Ralph Jarrett, an engineer at Carbide."

He looked up the number and I telephoned Jarrett at work, arranged to see him at home at 5:00 P.M.

"Don't forget to ask him to show you the saucer detector he's built," Hugh urged. "It's a scientific device which is supposed to detect the presence of UFOs."

I smiled when I thought of Hugh. He had been a dear friend over many years, and always used a great deal of "saucer talk" on his radio shows. He now had a half-hour program, McPherson's Journal, on which he used material of local interest along with offbeat interviews.

I wondered if he were pulling my leg about the saucer detector. Hugh had a great warmth of personality—yet displayed a touch of the sardonic when he discussed UFOs. Although he vowed he didn't "buy" the ufological syndrome, he nevertheless always seemed to be fascinated by it.

Another pall of smoke in the sky signalled that I was nearing Institute, one of the satellite industrial towns of Charleston, this one boasting a small smoky state college campus, a Negro school recently integrated, now receiving more state funds and trying to raise its status to compete with the formerly all-white institutions.

The setting sun burst out suddenly through the smog to offer some small reprieve to the dismal mood of the area; but in so doing it served to outline the tanks and towers of the vast Carbide plant, which dominated the town and was now transformed into a sprawling skeleton, spectrally back-lighted in red.

"A perfect setting," I thought, "for what I'm about to hear from Jarrett."

An ambulance, double-parked in front of a small wood frame house, further complicated the traffic congestion. Approaching and swinging around the vehicle I saw two white-coated men, restraining and leading an old woman out of the dwelling. She held onto a sheet of paper which she tried to raise into the air, apparently to attract passersby. The red light of the setting sun added to the unreality of the scene, like something out of Bram Stoker's Dracula.

With long, uncombed hair streaming, and dressed in an ill-fitting smock-like attire, the woman seemed to be begging anybody to hear her out. Through my rolled-down window, my eyes caught her fierce gaze which also contained the quality of piteous defeat and helplessness. Somehow she broke the firm grip on her arm, held the paper high and cried at me:

"Dr. Pandolus is no fool! Look what I wrote in the dark!"

This tragic situation added to the gloom of the late afternoon, along with

the traffic which threw a layer of mud on my windshield, and the cold hostility of the wind and rain.

Once in Ralph Jarrett's neat study, however, the engineer's hospitality and warm friendliness soon had me cheered and relaxed—and discussing UFOs.

"The boys at the plant don't really think I'm a nut; they know me too well for that," he told me; "but they still play these little jokes on me. Today, for example, someone took an ordinary saucer (the kind that goes with a cup), wrote what might be construed as a 'message from outer space' on it, and slipped it into my locker. I don't know how they got the blasted combination, but there's a lot of bright boys down there. I suppose they could also make a good living at safecracking."

I asked him about the flying saucer detector Hugh had mentioned.

"He probably made a big deal of it," Jarrett replied. "Really there's not too much to it, and it's something anybody can build. It's only a bar-type magnet pointing north and south. If nothing bothers its equilibrium it remains in that orientation. But if another magnetic influence, such as this small permanent magnet, intrudes into the vicinity—here, I'll show you…" He brought the small horseshoe magnet close to the apparatus. The bar magnet moved, touching an electrical contact and activating a loud buzzer. He removed the horeshoe and the noise stopped.

"To the bar magnet and the contacts you add flashlight cells and most any bell or buzzer—and you have yourself a good watchdog in case a saucer comes around."

Except for his deliberately setting it off, the ufological alarm had sounded only once during the year it had been operative. One evening he heard the buzzer, ran out into the yard and witnessed a star-like object. Initially it appeared to be stationary, but suddenly began moving and quickly receded into the distance.

Jarrett reviewed the evidence collected by UFO researchers which showed that the saucers, whatever they were, often displayed one common denominator: they exhibited decided electromagnetic effects, often interfering with and deadening auto ignition circuits and causing engines to stop. From reports he had collected, he also believed that the great eastern electrical power blackout may have been caused by the unidentified objects.

He replaced the plastic lid on the box containing the detector, moved to a cabinet and withdrew a detailed drawing he had made of the strange machine Tad Jones had seen and described to him.

“I knew Tad Jones very well about ten years ago, when he worked for Carbide. I lost track of him though, after he quit and opened an appliance store in Crosslanes, a few miles west of here.”

The drawing depicted a spherical object with a port or window in the top of it, with four protruding landing gear, an antenna, and a strange propellor. He reviewed Jones’ account.

On the evening of January 19, 1967, Jones was returning from Charleston to Crosslanes. He had followed approximately the same route I had taken, then had swung onto the beginning of the newly completed section of interstate highway a short distance beyond Institute. As he neared the Crosslanes exit, his low beams caught an obstruction on the long straight stretch ahead of him. He tramped the lights to bright, slowed, hit the turn signal and swung into the left-hand lane. As he approached the obstruction, his curiosity grew.

At first he thought the object was some sort of state road equipment, though he wondered why it would be left on the highway without warning lights and signs. The bright metallic glint of the spherical thing was now becoming more apparent, and he was picking out more details. Now more curious, he eased back into the right lane, with the intent of stopping and observing the object.

He estimated it to be about 20 ft. in diameter. Next he saw it was not resting on the road, but hovering a foot or so above it. He then noted a slowly-revolving propellor-type device, connected to a short protruding shaft on the underside. But the “propellor” was odd, indeed.

“Tad called it an ‘impellor’.” He said it looked for all the world like a washing machine agitator. As he came to a stop, about ten or fifteen feet from the thing, he said the ‘impellor’ began rotating very rapidly and became a blur. Suddenly the sphere shot up into the air at great speed, and as he rolled down his window and put his head out to get another look at it, all he could see was a light, departing rapidly and then vanishing.”

“Ralph,” I told him, “you have just mentioned another of these things that so often bother me. Jones said the propeller looked like a washing machine agitator. So often, parts of and aspects of these machines seem almost frighteningly terrestrial. Next thing, I’ll bet you’ll tell me it had rubber tires.”

“Exactly! You must have read about this. Tad described the ‘landing gear’ as airplane-type, such as you’d see on a very small plane, maybe a Piper Cub —with rubber tires, just as you say.”

Like the Woodrow Derenberger case, which also occurred on an incompleted interstate highway, near Parkersburg, about a hundred miles to the

north, here was an opportunity to obtain many substantiating witnesses—for this road must certainly be well-traveled.

Jarrett explained that Jones had noted several passing cars, but observed that most people would not stop when they saw something unusual in the road. As was Jones' first impression, they probably thought the object was some ordinary piece of road equipment. and were thoroughly accustomed to objects in the road because of the many construction projects they encountered during the building of the new highway. He did say that one man, a barber, had told friends of seeing an unusual object, and that he was trying to locate the witness, so far without results.

"Tad's story is backed up in other ways," Ralph added. "There is this fellow who lives near Bancroft. I had a difficult time getting him to talk, and was successful only after telling him some of my own experiences."

The same night Jones has observed the sphere, the man had gone home and masked his fear by informing his wife, "You can't guess what happened to me. I've just been buzzed by a water tank on the interstate!"

He was driving east, in the opposite direction from that traveled by Jones. A brilliant orange light appeared in the sky ahead of him, rapidly descended and changed to purple as it reached road level and approached him on a collision course. He slammed on the brakes of his truck, ran it onto the shoulder, and crouched down. As he did so, the thing suddenly rose and passed over him, barely clearing his vehicle. It was then he could see it was not just a light, but a well-defined spherical object. He watched as it again descended to road level, speeded along for a few hundred yards, and then rose and disappeared as a brilliant light, changing, again, from purple back to orange.

"During the same week, Jarrett continued, "two of my neighbors, who live about two blocks from me, were going to a basketball game at Page Jr. High School, when they saw a gray metallic-looking object. They caught it in their headlights, speeding ahead of them on Strawberry road. Like the thing Tad saw, it suddenly popped up into the sky and disappeared. A group of school children down in Sun Valley also reported seeing a sphere, earlier the same day."

I then asked about the rumor, passed on to me by Hugh McPherson, about Jones' disappearance. At first Jarrett seemed reluctant to answer, then did admit that the witness had indeed vanished, along with his family, apparently in the middle of the night—for the neighbors had not seen them move out.

"But there really were some other circumstances," he hesitatingly added, as if pondering whether he should continue.

"Do you mean those notes which were stuck under his door (John Keel had told me about this)?"

"Oh, that. I took John Keel to see Tad, while Keel was here to investigate the case. We concluded, however, that they were written by a prankster, in the same manner that the boys at the plant play jokes on me.

"Those notes were hand printed, with charcoal, I would guess, on pieces of cardboard about four by eight inches. They had been deliberately burned around the edges. I don't remember exactly what they said, only something like, 'You have been warned! Do not talk about this further!' and so on.

"They were worded much like the prank telephone calls I've received now and then. But, of course, there was this one occasion I'm not sure of—the morning the story about Jones appeared in The Charleston Gazette.

"At the time I hadn't yet seen the paper, for this was before breakfast, and I was in the bathroom. I hadn't begun shaving, however, so I went into the bedroom and picked up the extension. I heard a very clear 'beep-beep' sound.

" 'Ralph, what is that?' my wife, who was on the phone downstairs, asked me. 'I don't know—it's very strange,' Itold her.

"The beeping continued for about two, maybe three minutes. Then the phone went dead and the dial tone came on. I've heard all sorts of code transmissions on short wave, but nothing quite like that."

I gathered that the "other circumstances" Jarrett mentioned earlier had nothing to do with the threatening notes, for he had ascribed little importance to them. I asked him if he was withholding something—information that might explain Jones' flight from the Charleston area.

Beyond a few generalities and hints, Jarrett gave me little additional information. He had promised his secrecy to Jones, in exchange for the information, he finally explained, terminating his discussion of the case.

Jones, I reasoned, had not been unduly alarmed by the thing on the interstate highway, nor by the threatening notes. What had happened to him, to frighten him into leaving the area?

Trying to construct a theory from my notes of my conversation with Jarrett, I confess I cannot come up with much. But this does certainly involve some incredible occurrence on a dark, rainy night, during which Jones was driving north to Ripley.

I can envision a light following his car, a fog enveloping him, and his being lifted, lifted, into a wild, horrible phantasmagoria. He returned from it, but somehow he felt that a Something, somehow, somewhere, still held onto a part

of him.

CHAPTER 12

THE MEN IN BLACK

In the shadows, the Men In Black had long lurked, biding their time, waiting. Here and there, now and then, some people thought they had seen them, but they weren't quite certain; perhaps they more sensed than actually regarded them.

Fourteen years earlier, the shadowy visitors had shown themselves openly. Then they had descended upon flying saucer buffs, threatening and terrorizing them, hushing them up.

Al K. Bender, a UFO researcher, had been the first known victim, in 1952. He was turning a certain theory over and over in his mind. He thought he had some hard evidence about the origin and purpose of unidentified flying objects. Then one day he performed a certain experiment, and the lurking horror came. It began with glowing blue lights. Then came the stranger with the luminous eyes in the darkened theatre, and later on the dusky street. It culminated when the men in black, three of them, paid him a visit.

Bender gave up his predilection with the UFOs; and the men indicated they would go away.

In Canada, and even Australia, they showed up. They were deeply tanned, mysterious and threatening. Some people thought they were Government Men, though most UFO researchers agreed that they were emissaries from outer space (or even from the Inner Earth)! Their mission appeared to be quite simple, however: they wished to silence those people who had found out too much about flying saucers.

The visitors, usually in groups of three, gave but one concession to civility. They dressed in neat black suits, and wore black, somewhat conservative hats.

No doubt the men in black had also received undue credit for acts they had no connection with, as rumors have a way of growing—such as the instance of the researcher who claimed to have been pushed off balance on an escalator by invisible forces, and to have suffered serious injuries. No doubt many UFO enthusiasts, reading of the men in black, picked up their telephones and rang up people who they knew were frightened by the idea, and spoke dire warnings to them in assumed foreign accents, usually German.

In the fifties there had been a brief flurry of other shadowy terrorists, including the International Bankers, pictured not as an ordinary group of financeers, but as an alien, interplanetary organization, in one instance said to be headed by a notorious Otto Von Mobile, from a distant planet in the Orion galaxy.

The Bankers had even dared to mail letters, written on formal, engraved stationery, threatening the cleansing of Earth, set to "the marching music of explosions".

But now, for more than ten years, the men in black had been absent from the ufological scene. Bender said they had left this planet, in a vast mother ship they had concealed in Antarctica, after their work on Earth had been completed —though their phantoms continued to haunt him because of the tiny and undiscoverable instrument they had planted in his brain. He knew they were gone, however, because the small disc they left with him had one day suddenly crumbled into dust, accompanied by an abominable sulphurous odor.

With the three men apparently gone, and now only a legend, saucer buffs turned, not to a new, but to an ancient device for personifying and thus exorcising their fears. As mankind reacts to sex, death, inmates of asylums, autocratic rulers and other little-understood matters, they employed an ancient device, and they laughed. They giggled in uncontrollable spasms, and put on their own black suits and shouted, "Boo!"

Bender warned that the three men might return, and he was correct—if they were the same persons—many doubted that they were. Although, like history, they were to repeat themselves, they were to do so in somewhat different character.

So in November, 1966, for reasons known only to themselves, they decided that the time for their reappearance was at hand.

In wild, undignified behavior, like lunatics following some mad piper, they paraded in the crazy crippled chicken tracks of Mothman, following the great bird into Point Pleasant, and the Ohio valley.

Mary Hyre

The Athens Messenger, a daily published in Athens, Ohio, enjoys a Point Pleasant circulation that rivals the local paper. In the northern part of Mason County it even exceeds the popularity of the latter.

The competition will tell you that the demand for The Messenger is due to the reporting skill of one individual, who, some years ago, began to send local news items to the out-of-town paper.

Soon Point Pleasant people began reading the items and buying the Athens publication. The reporter had a true "nose for news". She could uncover local items people really cared about, and little daily personal things about their lives, and insignificant but popular items, such as the one about a muskrat seen on the street at midnight, and which walked to an intersection and waited for the traffic light before crossing.

Births, christenings, graduations, marriages, and the daily obituaries—she chronicled all of them. Local circulation grew and West Virginia side advertisers began inquiring about rates. Finally the Ohio paper opened a local office, with a direct teletype wire back to Athens.

Mary Hyre put down the phone. Mrs. Adkins had just been taken to the hospital. But she had got through to the head nurse, and it was nothing serious: a mild case of flu. She dialed the fire department to check on the latest run, having heard a siren a few minutes previously.

"False alarm, Mary," Ted Jenkins told her; "Old Mrs. Cleveland's cat was up in a tree and afraid to come back down. Casualties: one fireman scratched. Damages: We hit a chuck hole and busted a spring. Over and out, honey."

Mary scribbled some notes. To Ted, the fireman the run had been a wild goose chase, but she quickly sensed it would make an excellent feature story. Mrs. Cleveland was well liked, although some people thought she was a bit "off", because of her propensity for taking in all the stray dogs and cats that came to her place (for some unexplained reason, possibly by sixth sense). She provided a private animal shelter, caring and finding homes for the creatures. Why had she never thought of writing a story about the eccentric but benign woman?

But she would have to put it aside, for the story she was working on intrigued her more greatly; in fact she was beginning to feel it was growing into an obsession.

Mary Hyre seldom had difficulty composing a news account, and rarely

needed to do a rewrite. With only a few scribbled notes she could sit down at the teletype and transmit a complete story, ready for the linotype; though sometimes journalism students of Ohio University, who did actual practice at the Messenger office, would tear off the copy at the other end and rewrite it, "flowering it up", as Mary described it.

"Actually," she told me, "those kids always improve my copy; and they never bother the really important stories, such as court reports and board of education meetings."

Mary was having trouble with the story, she reasoned, because she had been personally involved with it. But it boiled down to her difficulty in describing one important fact: THOSE EYES!

She hadn't seen the creature itself, only its hypnotic red eyes which flashed for a brief second or so in the darkness of the lonely T.N.T. area. Why had the eyes impressed her so deeply? Why was she obviously so emotionally involved in the experience?

She looked out the steamed office window into the cold November drizzle. Although it was the noon hour, very few people were in the streets, and those huddled under great black umbrellas as they hurried briskly for shelter from the inhospitable exterior. Through the misty window they took on distorted shapes in a macabre parade. She caught herself wondering if one's entire life might represent a distorted mummery, watched upon by some even stranger Reality, as It was alternately amused, bored and apathetic.

The previous night now was reminiscent of the almost unreal scene outside —the crowds of people filling the grounds of the abandoned T.N.T. powerhouse; the long-haired teenagers bantering the two young couples; a holiday mood, but one with a tenseness; the crowd fearing, and possibly even hoping that the creature would return and show itself.

She first got the lead from her daily look at the city police blotter. It was a terse report of a frightening creature sighted by the Scarberry and Mallette couples. She had phoned them and soon learned that their story involved far more than a crackpot account. She filed a brief report on the teletype, and soon the machine began to clatter out a return message.

"Get more on the monster," it ordered. "We gave your blurb to AP and they want more."

The phone rang. It was Channel 13, Huntington, whose news editor had already seen the brief AP item, and was trying to get the whole story. They carried the "Batman" TV show, and had coined a name for the bird-like

creature, as a promo for the series. They thought “Mothman” might be a good appellation.

The night following the initial appearance of “Mothman” at the old plant, Mary joined the throng which drove to the area after hearing the news report. Despite the seriousness with which many seemed to be taking the matter, a holiday mood prevailed, and there was a great deal of laughter and good humor. One preacher, however, of a local minor sect, had ensconced himself on top of a car and had managed to attract a small group around him. His fierce eyes gleaming, he shouted in choked phrases, punctuating each statement with an “Uh!”

“If you want to go to heaven, Uh! Repent, Uh! Cast away these evil spirits, Uh! Cast away, oh brothers and sisters, these worldly things, Uh! The indecent lipstick and the rouge, Uh! And the beer gardens, Uh!.”

Then apparently connecting recent events with a biblical account, he quoted the Book of Ezekiel. He read it slowly but stentorially, temporarily losing the speech impediment.

“ ‘Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

“ ‘The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel’“

Punctuating the reading with an admonition that the bird creature was a sign sent by God, he continued by describing how the strange beings in Ezekiel’s vision “ 'went upon their four sides: and they turned not as they went.’“

At this point, as Mary was walking away, the speaker suddenly repeated the phrase, “and they turned not as they went”. Then he repeated it over and over, his manner becoming frenzied. The small group of followers responded at each repetition with “Amen!” To her the statement was meaningless.

Suddenly she had a compelling impulse to look toward a spot beyond and to the right of the powerhouse. There she glimpsed the red, glowing curiously reflecting eyes—for a fleeting instant.

At that moment she knew the two young couples were telling the truth, and that they had indeed seen something very much like the thing they described.

She reviewed her notes again. Perhaps she should try first to type out the story, and then edit and redo it—though she was so accustomed to the electric keyboard of the teletype that she could not type well on the manual office

typewriter.

So occupied was she with the dilemma of composing the story, she had not heard the front door, that faced the street, open and shut.

Perhaps it had been her involvement with the outre events, or failing to note the man come in until she suddenly saw him standing in front of her desk, that startled her (she has since wondered if the man had indeed entered through the door, for it had noisy, oil hungry hinges—it had swollen, and had to be forced, and was generally noisy when it was opened).

There, before her, stood a man, who by conservative explanations still could be described as "weird". He was not tall, about 5'1", she later conjectured. He wore no coat, only dark blue or black trousers, and a blue shirt. His garb gave her the impression of its being a uniform, and had he worn a cap he might have been mistaken for a policeman. He had blonde hair, combed straight back on his head.

It was the man's eyes, however, that disturbed her, after she had recovered from her initial shock of suddenly seeing him standing there. Or was it his lack of eyes? He wore glasses with very thick lenses that disclosed the eyes only as a blur. Still she could sense somehow that the eyes never moved nor diverted from her as would be normal. She knew they were constantly riveted upon her.

The man, in a halting, sing-song voice (sounding as if it were recorded), asked her the directions to Welch, a mining town in southern West Virginia. As she reflected on the best route, he explained that his car was there; and he extracted a bill of sale from a pocket and held it briefly before her eyes. It was written to some person with a long and undecipherable last name.

Except for proffering the document, which he hastily withdrew, the man did not move, standing there like a statue, still (again she more fancied than observed) holding her in the gaze of the immobile eyes.

Gathering her wits, she began giving him the directions to Welch; but he seemed to be disinterested in the information. Making his only movement to that moment, he put his two hands on the desk and leaned toward her. She noticed his hands were very white, with neatly manicured nails.

"My family," he told her, "live in Grundy, Virginia. My truck broke down in Detroit, and it was very cold there."

The last statement was most contradictory. For he wore no coat at all, only the uniform-type shirt.

As he continued failing to be interested in or responding to the directions, he again leaned closer, and she fancied the blurred eyes behind the thick lenses

were beginning to affect her hypnotically.

She grew more frightened. She had a feeling that the man was trying to envelop her, or merge with her. How was she to get out of the situation? She knew: she would call the police! But she dare not ask them to come, or it was hard to tell what the man might do. She would call on the pretense of asking directions, and they would know by the tone of her voice that something was wrong, and they would check. She hoped to God they would!

She dialed the number, explaining, "I can get you better directions to Welch."

The secretary answered. All of the officers were out to lunch or on outside duty; then she continued to give Mary explicit directions for reaching Welch, without understanding the clue about her predicament.

Mary again stalled by giving him an alternate routing, but when she looked up he was again much closer. Without any explanatory remark, he suddenly withdrew the glasses. They had covered and disguised what were only eye-like openings. If indeed he did possess eyes, they were sunk far back into the apertures! She felt herself going limp.

Then noises from behind reassured her. Bob Rickard, director of a local Office of Economic Opportunity project, who had an office adjacent to hers, separated only by a locked door, was returning from lunch early. Recovering her composure, she dashed to the door, pulled the latch, and called to him. He entered, surveyed the visitor, who by that time was backing away from the desk and showing visible signs of discomfiture.

"This man is from Detroit. His truck broke down there." That was the only thing she could think of to say.

Bob sensed something was wrong.

"How did you get here from Detroit?" he asked.

"I had to hitch-hike."

"Where is your coat? It's very cold outside."

"I—I left it in the truck," the visitor, his sing-song voice growing more halting, replied.

For the first time Mary, now standing, glanced down at his feet. He must be much shorter than he originally appeared to be, for his shoes, similar to those of a policeman, were thick-soled, and obviously built up, perhaps a couple of inches.

The man abruptly turned, stepped haltingly and angularly toward their right, turned in an odd way and half backed out the door. He apparently took

off toward the bridge, for he did not pass the window.

"That was a real weird character, Mary," Bob joked. But she could read puzzlement in his voice and face.

"Was he trying to threaten or harm you?"

"No, he just gave me the creeps—that's the best way I can describe it."

"I've seen my share of beatnicks, hippies and queer people in my work," he remarked, still puzzled, "and some even weirder than that; but this man just sort of threw me. He—well he—just sort of gave me the creeps too."

Throughout her strange, brief interview with the stranger, she later reasoned that she had not so much been afraid of physical harm as she had of what she might term an unknown quantity about him, as if she were involved with something totally outside her experience.

It was a different kind of fear she would experience later, when she would hear the rumble, first low and throbbing, then gaining quickly in volume, until it was something that "went into one ear, seemed to remain there for a moment, and then rushed out the other". She would not hear the screams; she was too far away for that. And the pitiful cries would be drowned out, anyhow, by the groaning and crashing steel. The thunder would subside, replaced by the muted sobbings of the living.

Donna Kenmore

On the Ohio side, Donna Kenmore saw the silvery disc. She and her best friend, Norma Ashley, had been out for a drive, not knowing that their gay excursion would lead to terror.

Norma had been cheerful enough when Donna picked her up, and they had joked and gossiped in their usual fashion. But soon Norma grew silent, and Donna suspected that she was relapsing into "one of her moods".

When Norma complained of being car sick, Donna's thoughts became occupied with her friend's problems. She knew Norma was having some disagreements with her father lately, which probably lay at the root of her moodiness, and she had often gone out of her way to suggest activities which would cheer her up. She telephoned her more often than usual, and had recently sent her a rather expensive gift: a riding habit her uncle sent from France, where he held a position in the embassy.

"I'll pull off here," she told Norma, "and you can get out and walk around. Then I'll take you straight home."

She pulled off the road, into the grounds of the abandoned water tank. She looked at her friend. Norma was obviously agitated, beginning to look pale, and, she thought, suddenly much older.

"I don't want to get out," she told her. "Let's just sit here for a minute or two. I'm sure I'll soon feel better."

She pushed the window button of the Olds 98, and the cold air rushed into the car.

"You need some air, Norma. I know it's cold, but maybe it will make you feel better."

"I'm sorry, Donna. I'm terribly sorry. I think it's because I'm so nervous. So horribly nervous. He did this to me again!"

"Who is 'he'?"

"Dad. He told me this morning, again, that I should act more like my mother. Goodness knows I don't want to do that. Her interminable screechings at me, ever since I decided to come back from school: 'Do this, do that. Do more of the housework!' After all, we are quite well off; we have a housekeeper—and a cook—so why should I have to worry! Why should I have to make up my bed? Now I love Dad, you know that; but now finally he has joined in with HER! If he truly loved me, he wouldn't listen to her all the time. After all, I'm important too. Mom is so jealous. Every time Dad pays any attention to me, she throws a fit."

Donna tried to say something appropriate, but was interrupted:

"Today, for the first time, he shouted at me. He has finally turned against me. When he did this, I got sick, and threw up—and just the thought of it makes me sick again."

Norma had previously spoken of tensions at home, and while Donna had been concerned, she had never taken the remarks seriously. She assumed the Ashleys were having "just family spats", and had so passed off the matter. But Norma now seemed to be very obviously disturbed, and for the first time she began to worry about her.

Suddenly Norma threw her arms around her and started to cry.

"You're the only friend I have who understands me," she said in halting, sobbing phrases. "Please understand me, Donna! Please understand me!"

Donna returned the embrace and patted her.

"It will all work out all right. There now, don't you cry now, you never do. I'm sure your father loves you very much. Why, just the other day, when I stopped by to pick you up, there he was, washing the car, and he came out and

shook hands with me and said, 'Have you seen Norma since she got that new hairdo and that short skirt? I don't understand her. In fact I don't understand any of the young folks. Finally, that girl is really blossoming out. I really guess she has been blossomed out for a long time, but has never dressed to show it. I doubt if I can hold onto her very long, for lately there's been a lot of guys casting glances at her. But I suppose that comes with old age: losing your daughter to some young smart alec!"

She apparently had said the wrong thing. Norma's demeanor took a turn for the worse. She grasped Donna more tightly and her sobbing became uncontrollable. Donna pitied her, but was at her wits' ends at trying to comfort her.

At that moment she saw the silvery disc. It had a hazy, amorphous shape, as it hovered above the old water tank. It moved in an odd, pendulum-like motion, almost as if it were on a great string or cable, dangled by some inexplicable being or force from above.

"Look, Norma! Look! What is that!"

In her excitement she tore herself from the embrace.

"My God!" Norma ejaculated. "It's out to destroy the both of us!"

Donna couldn't understand the statement, for to her the silvery disc brought a feeling of contentment, a sensation of calm and well being. Norma had obviously felt its presence, rather than having seen it, for she had reacted to it without looking up from her tearful convulsions.

"I'm all right now," she suddenly insisted. "Let's get out of here!"

Donna wanted to watch it longer. Now it had begun to circle. She thought she could see windows in it. It was beautiful. Fearing, however, to contribute to Norma's emotional condition, she started the car and soon they were speeding toward home. At her house Norma suddenly opened the door, leaped from the car without a goodbye and retreated inside the house.

"Tomorrow," Donna thought, "she probably will be in great spirits. That's Norma for you. But she's still the best friend I've ever had."

Then she remembered she must pick up the dress she had fitted the past week.

It was somewhat shorter than the traditional formal, but the other girls were wearing them that way, and she knew Bob wouldn't say anything about it, even though he would disapprove. Anyhow, Bob's mother was her ally, and it had been she who had given her the dress from her shop and who had personally made the alterations.

She knew Bob would like her to wear a more traditional, more feminine gown; but he wouldn't vocally object—for they were in what surely must be their final courting days, and he was most unlikely to dispute his mother's selection.

"Bob needs a real shock, I think," his mother had remarked, "to get him out of that prissy attitude about things. I keep telling you to give him a real scare by going out one time with some other boy, but you won't do that. Maybe if you look a little sexier…I know, and please forgive me, honey, for he has told me that you two have never, well, you know, done anything. That's the way he is, a stickler for convention, and I'm thankful for it. But you've got to make him 'pop the question'. God knows you two have been going together long enough."

Donna was certain he would talk about marriage in his own good time. After all, he had just been graduated, and was "trying to get established", as he put it. He had not yet decided what to do. His mother wanted him gradually to take over her business, and his close buddy, Brad King, had been importuning him to form a partnership with him in a profitable mail order business. Anyhow, he did discuss marriage one time, briefly, when he said he didn't want to take on the responsibility until he could "make it on his own".

Donna drove into Point Pleasant and looked for a parking spot. But it was Saturday and the town was crowded with shoppers. There probably were spaces on the other side of the flood wall, but the area always gave her the jitters and depressed her, even before the rumor about the woman who claimed to have been attacked here.

She drove around the three main blocks several times, easing her frustration by looking at the Christmas decorations, and at the people, hurrying through the cold drizzle, many of them dragging small children behind them at a frantic pace.

For comic relief there was old Bill Ahrens, the traditional Santa Claus at one of the stores, shouting a voluble "Ho! Ho! Ho!" while bouncing a small boy with exaggerated oscillations. Some teenage boys were bantering him, and he would intermittently utter loud explectives at them, then hoarsely converse with the small children. Of course, he had too many "under the belt", as the townspeople would say; and the past year he had been fired a week before Christmas—but the customers protested so loudly he had been rehired a day later.

Giving up the search for a meter, Donna reluctantly drove behind the floodwall, while the long row of free parking spaces, carrying advertisements

of local business firms which offered them, were almost fully occupied.

The foggy expanse of the Ohio river, swollen by the rains, and now even more dismal in the gathering darkness, was muddy, and full of floating debris. She didn't know why, but it seemed to smother her, and draw her into it. The dark and depressing water and landscape was dominated by the vast structure of the Silver Bridge, now no longer silver, but rusty and ugly, sprawling above the gurgling waters and the gray flood wall like some once living but now dead and rotting thing. It shook, swayed slightly, and she fancied, groaned, under the heavy rush hour traffic.

She straightened the car in the parking space, locked the three other doors, and reached into the rear seat for the umbrella. Then making sure she had the keys securely in her hand, she pressed the button and locked the left front door in a slam.

Somebody grabbed her roughly and uncouthly from behind. She screamed and was almost free, when the man, whom she could now see (although in her fright his image had swirled, partly out of focus), got a better grip and held her more securely.

He was slovenly dressed, in ill-fitting trousers, an old black jacket over a black turtle neck sweater. In quick actions he soon had pulled her dress almost over her head, and she knew he was trying to smother her. She fought his actions, and managed to pull the dress down until she could see. He was dragging her toward the Model '60 or '61 Chevrolet parked two spaces over. She again tried to scream, but his strong hand now roughly and securely covered her mouth.

In an even greater display of strength, her attacker freed his left hand from her tight grasp and forced it between her legs which she had tightened together, as if in anticipation of what he might do once he had her in the car. Once she had eluded the grasp in a display of strength she did not know she had, but had fallen onto the wet roadway; this had given him an opportunity to get an even better hold on her. He grabbed her and pushed her against the car, kissing her violently on the mouth, as her lipstick transferred to him, making him even uglier and even more repelling. Later she would remember that she expected his breath to be particularly foul; but instead it had a perfumed odor to it.

Somehow, during the violent struggle, she had held onto the umbrella, now crushed and half closed. One of the framework spines had wounded her abdomen, and in a final burst of anger she thought how she would like to wound the terrible man. She managed to draw it back and drive it home, where

she knew it would hurt worst.

Unclutched, she ran and ran, and on the main street retched and vomited into a waste receptacle.

Donna got over the experience itself much more quickly than she had anticipated and reached a time where she did not, each week in church, thank God that she had not been physically harmed or abducted. But still there was the subtle disquietude that it indeed might happen again, mainly because of the note. Written in an obviously disguised hand, placed under the front door of her house and warning that, "I CAN HAVE YOU ANY TIME I SO DESIRE. YOU CANNOT ESCAPE ME. YOU DID NOT HEAR ME OUT."

Was this indeed written by the man who had tried to rape her? She somehow doubted it; she hoped it had been put there by somebody trying to perpetrate a cruel joke. The writing was definitely feminine (she had once taken a correspondence course in handwriting analysis) and displayed anything but roughness and masculinity. Perhaps he was one of the illiterate river people, who always had two or three women around, having children by all of them. He probably had one of those whores write the note for him.

Agar

Agar adjusted his large-brimmed hat and buttoned his coat of black more tightly, even though it was a warm day and the people he had observed were in shirt sleeves. They appeared to be uncomfortable, even in their brief garbs, and perspired freely. Agar wondered why he was not similarly affected, though he was glad he did not have problems such as this.

If he had any serious problems, he had not thought about them. His work occupied most of his thinking. Today, for example, he could concentrate only on the compelling impulse which drew him into the cover of bushes behind the school playground, where he secreted himself, waiting and watching for the child to whom he was so strongly drawn. While he waited, an excitement came over him. It was more than the usual involvement. This was going to be a big one, for the victim had projected extraordinarily powerful vibrations.

Suddenly he spotted the person who had so drawn him, over many miles, the boy who had photographed the moth creature. The child was standing apart from the group, and as he watched, walked aimlessly in circles.

"Soon you will come over here, closer to the bushes where I hide," Agar thought and knew. The boy moved closer toward him, but in a series of

perambulations involving further circling and parabolic curves, with now and then a quick step sidewise.

Although Agar didn't understand why, he felt strangely compassionate toward the boy, and he fought this feeling because it made him physically weak, and mentally disoriented. For a moment he felt he would rather have gone into the playground and pitched balls to him, as the others were doing, instead of confronting him about the picture. The boy's blonde hair fell over his eyes, half hiding a sensitive and beautiful face, and as he moved close to Agar's hiding place, he brushed it back twice, evidently so that he could use his eyes better.

He huddled lower, as the boy approached, drawn to him it would seem, as much as he had been drawn to come here and seek out the child. Closer and closer he came, but now he slackened his pace, as if he anticipated meeting some untoward circumstance.

Within a few feet of Agar's hiding place he stopped dead still, and Agar fancied he could hear him breathing heavily. He probably would not come any closer, and the most propitious time to strike probably had arrived.

He parted the bushes, suddenly disclosing himself, and rose to standing position, at the same time fixing the boy's blue eyes in his fierce gaze. The child would soon run screaming back to the school, but by that time he would be far away.

But the child unexpectedly stood his ground, innocently staring back at Agar's slit-like eyes. Probably he was hypnotized by fright, and this would pretty well fulfill his mission, if that were true.

To make certain, he threatened the boy severely in a mechanical, somewhat nasal, but low-pitched voice. The boy glanced downward, hung his head, and picked at his fingernails not again looking up. The boy was not frightened at all! A feeling of anger, unusual for him, came over Agar, and he realized that he was frightened, and the boy was not.

He advanced on the boy, grabbed him and shook him, but still he did not react with fright. He then tore at the boy's pocket and withdrew a frayed billfold, took the snapshot from it, and then threatened him again. Still the boy fiddled with his fingernails without looking up; then he reached into a side pocket, removed a pen knife and some shiny pebbles he probably had found in a creek, and held the items out as if he wished to freely give them to him.

In further fright and anger, Agar roughly struck the small white hand, and the contents dropped to the ground. Now completely defeated and shaken, he

made a series of hopping, bouncing motions, and soon was out on the main thoroughfare, escaping as fast as he could, always making five steps forward, then one step right, then five more steps and one step left.

He felt he could regain his strength at the next stop. Donning dark glasses and relaxing the severe manner, he knocked politely at a door, and was quickly admitted when he told the woman he had come to ask her about the flying saucer she had seen.

She was overjoyed, and for an hour he suffered her oral aggression, but this was one of the unpleasant facets of his work which he must put up with. Pretending to listen to the lengthy details of her sighting, and politely asking a leading question here and there when he could interrupt the monologue, he let his mind stray to the boy and to analyzing his failure. He believed he had done the job well, and that there must be some logical reason why he had not accomplished the desired results.

Perhaps he should have dressed as a policeman, and convinced the boy he was in trouble with the law…

But he could sense the woman was near the end of her seemingly interminable narrative. It was time to act now, before she could continue by switching to occult subjects.

He withdrew a bundle of forms from his attache case, and began writing down things, while looking about the room, as if listing the furniture. Now ignoring his hostess, he arose, walked to the TV set, closely examined the controls, and then wheeled it around and copied the serial number from its back. The woman, now obviously nervous, stopped her talking while she observed his actions.

He then asked her a series of unrelated questions:

"Does the house have a steel framework? Has anybody else visited you in regard to this sighting? Has your husband ever had a security check? Do you consider yourself a loyal citizen? Did you vote Democratic or Republican in the last election? Have you ever felt that your telephone was tapped? Have you told your neighbors about the sighting? Did you notice a shield-like symbol on the flying object? Has anybody in your family ever been arrested?"

As she attempted to asnwer each question, she became visibly more frightened and confused. Then, upon his request, she quickly agreed to stop talking about the sighting to any other person, not even her husband (of course, she would spread the story widely throughout the community).

At the next stop he employed different tactics and simply walked about the

neighborhood, knowing that many eyes peered at him from the windows. Halting before a particular house, he made elaborate adjustments to his camera, and after readings with a light meter, he took pictures from several angles. Then making two chalk marks on the sidewalk, he stepped off the footage, then took copious notes.

He felt a new burst of energy. The next time he dealt with a child he would try a different technique, and would be more successful. He proceeded onward. As he approached the great bridge, however, the odd feeling of exhaustion he had experienced after the encounter with the boy once again overtook him. Half way across, he slowed his footsteps to regain his energies. He leaned over the railing of the pedestrian walkway, watching the river people below. Although they did not radiate to him, he suddenly felt a kind of unexplained kinship with them. But he could never be like them, or work with them, or interact with them.

Then out of the corner of his eye he saw the only object that had ever inspired terror deep within him. It was the same boy, with the eyes hidden by blonde hair, standing at the Ohio side of the bridge, though he could not imagine how he could have covered the great distance to be there so quickly. The child walked aimlessly in a small area, sometimes pausing to kick at the railing. He was waiting there for Agar, and Agar knew that.

Agar had never analyzed himself, except that he believed he was forever condemned to walk in sidewise motion, and that it had been these people who had so condemned him. He felt that he was a part of them, though an evil part of them, a fear part of them; and that since he was a part of so many people he would live forever—though he wondered if he really liked living as these people liked living.

He probably should retreat back to the West Virginia side of the river, for he felt panic at the prospect of another confrontation with the strange child, who did not react as others did, who obviously was not frightened by him, and therefore was certainly not a part of him. This boy, he believed, would somehow kill him, although the prospect of being killed, which struck great terror into people he had threatened, did not really bother him. If he died, perhaps there would no longer be this total dependence upon these people for his energies, and it would be with him, as peaceful and ecstatic as it was with people when they slept (as he had seen them do when he had slipped into their rooms and changed positions of their personal articles).

By this time the boy had become more aggressive and had advanced a

quarter of the way toward the center of the bridge, where Agar stood. He could retreat and avoid another confrontation, but that would involve admitted failure and a dereliction of his mission. If he stood his ground he probably would have to lay his hands on the boy again. He had never before physically touched another being. He had drawn his vital energies from people by remote means. When he had grabbed the child and shaken him, he had, admittedly, also drawn energies, but a different kind—or maybe they were just more powerful. Instead he believed that he, himself, had energies, which, in that case, had been drawn from him into the boy.

He made a decision. He would take the risk, although it probably meant his complete undoing. He would threaten to throw the boy over the bridge, and that might turn the tide. He would grab him roughly, lift him up, and let him see the great gulf below.

He moved firmly to confront his adversary. He stared at him. The boy gave in and looked away, as he slowly hummed some sort of tune in a minor key.

Agar grabbed him and pushed him against the railing.

"You see down there. That's where you're going to end up. I'm going to throw you over the bridge. Look at that murky water. You'll cry then and ask for help. You'll call for your father then. You'll ask for help when you're falling halfway down, turning over and over!"

The boy evidenced no reaction whatsoever, except for passively going limp. Agar hoisted him almost to his shoulders. Instead of kicking and screaming, as he had mentally predicted, the boy did not say or do anything, except to brush the ubiquitous hair from his eyes with his one free hand. Agar didn't know what to do. Of course he couldn't actually carry out his threats, but the boy had challenged him, and if he put him down he would have to run again.

Not knowing what to do, Agar just started walking, after he had put the boy's legs around his neck, so that he could better carry the burden that proved heavier than it had appeared. The boy must be a thirteen-year-old, possibly fourteen. He balanced him better and began walking ahead, toward the Ohio side.

How could he get out of this?

"You'll have quite a story to tell, child," he said. "You don't know how close you came to being thrown over the bridge. If you did not have certain information about the interplanetary intelligences which we have not collected, it would have been VERY VERY (he emphasized the 'Verys') serious."

“I’ll be good,” the boy spoke for the first time. “I won’t tell.”

“Oh, but you must tell,” Agar corrected, “else other children will be in danger of being thrown over the bridge.”

“Then I will if you say so.”

The rather large boy was getting lighter, and Agar suddenly felt proud that he could carry him without effort. It would be fun to jog him up and down a bit, but that would be out of character, and only serve to please his adversary which had shown no fearful response to violence. He also realized that, for the first time he could remember, he turned not as he went. He made five steps forward, and then another, with no sidewise motion.

“How will they ever know you tried to throw me over the bridge?” the boy asked. “They’ll never believe me. They say I tell lies in school.”

“They’ll have to take your word for it.”

“Gee, they won’t ever believe me.”

“I can’t help that. I’ll have to put you down now.”

They were almost across the bridge.

“If you see me vanish,” Agar told him suddenly, “do not tell this particular thing. They might believe this, but they would never understand it.”

He put the boy down and helped him raise to his feet. He slicked back the hair and for the first time saw tears in the eyes.

“Don’t go away, Agar!”

Agar tried to change the expression on the slit which was his mouth. He found it impossible to smile. He pushed the boy from him, opened his eyes as far as he could, growled at him and danced around. He changed into various shapes, and took to threatening the boy once again.

The boy sobbed.

“I know that you are dying, and I don’t want you to go!”

“Dying? of course not. I’m not going to die. But I do have to go over into Ohio, for I have very important business there. I won’t be back, for because from Ohio I have to go to Indianapolis.

“I think I can go right now, if you will promise not to make me come back.”

“If you will take this, you can go, Agar (Agar was puzzled as to how the boy knew his name).” He again handed him the rocks and the pen knife.

Agar accepted these gravely and put them in his pocket.

“Here, you take THIS.”

The boy eagerly grasped the object, turning it over and over, letting the light reflect on it from all angles. Then he held it close to his body, as if it

might get away.

He walked with the boy the remaining length of the bridge. Noting the absence of the arm around his shoulder, the boy looked up and Agar was no longer there.

CHAPTER 13

THE CURSE OF CORNSTALK

The Point Pleasant Battle Monument towered almost a hundred feet into the night sky. Erected as a memorial to heroes of the prerevolutionary Indian wars, it rose over a local museum, and in daytime commandeered a beautiful plaza.

Tonight, however, fog rose from the river and gave it an amorphous, undulating shape, backlighted by illumination from the town. The monument cast a grotesque shadow through the fog.

This had been the battleground on which the town had been defended from more than a thousand Indians, assembled by chief Cornstalk, a young Shawnee of remarkable courage and leadership. He had marshalled the warriors not only from his own tribe, but also from the Mingo, Deleware and Ottawa. The somewhat loose tribal federation became tightly united in war—an amalgamation known to local settlers simply as Northwest Indians.

In the 1760's the Indians were thoroughly defeated in a series of battles and a peace treaty of enduring quality was negotiated with chief Cornstalk.

As I regarded the spectral monument, the events of the past few months seemed to fade into oblivion as I considered the long, bloody struggles which had taken place on this very spot two hundred years ago.

The fog poured up from the river like smoke. First the base, then the apex of the monument disappeared into the murky shroud. Only the automobile headlights, their rays penetrating only a few feet, provided any reference to the world around me. Suddenly within the diffused beams I noted a violent agitation in the fog, as it swirled, and a myriad of colors appeared. The kaleidoscopic pattern changed, opened like a huge iris, to disclose a scene

within. Here in this great hollow tube in the fog appeared a remarkable and terrifying drama. Several men, some of them in uniform, others in the rough farm clothing of another century, dragged a handsome Indian, his long hair flowing and muscles rippling—and a small Indian boy—into the foreground.

The adult Indian was securely bound with ropes, and, considering his appearance, evidently had been beaten, and slashed with a knife. He still mustered strength as he tried to free himself and remonstrated loudly, though the entire drama was played out like a silent movie. The boy was not bound but securely held by two of the soldiers.

Suddenly the men threw the wounded man to the ground, kicked him and spat upon him. Withdrawing a ceremonial tomahawk (which I assumed belonged to the victim), one of the soldiers rained a series of bloody blows on the fallen body, as if trying to hack it to pieces. The Indian went limp. The boy struggled in his captors' grasp, as if wishing to offer assistance to the dying man. The soldiers momentarily released him, then threw him to the ground. As the child rose, one of the men swung the butt of his rifle, hitting him a tremendous blow on the head, crushing his skull with that first blow, I would think. Then he pointed the gun at the fallen adult and discharged it into his pelvic area.

Ben Franklin rolled down the window, stuck his head out, in order to better guide us through the the fog. We crept along at five miles per hour.

"I shouldn't have taken so long to tell you that awful story," he apologized, "but the fog usually doesn't come in this fast."

Downtown the visibility improved. We stopped at Ball's restaurant.

"You tell a gory tale," I half-kidded, half-complimented him. "With the fog, that eerie battle monument, and your harrowing description, for a moment I fancied I was almost actually witnessing the murder of chief Cornstalk."

The incident represented a black mark on the town's history. Cornstalk, though powerful and valiant in war, had been the major force in maintaining an uneasy peace. The region began to build and prosper. A few of the settlers, however, along with renegade soldiers, still harbored old grudges; so one night they seized chief Cornstalk and his young son and brutally murdered them.

Such had been the bloody account Ben had rendered, a rare interlude in our discussions and investigations of the Mothman incidents. Ben, after our initial interviews with the two young couples, had become my valuable ally in running down further reports. Because he was well known and highly

respected throughout the different economic and social strata of the area, a half dozen prominent people involved in business and politics had confided in him about their own sightings of creatures and flying objects. However, most of them would not consent to have their experiences publicized.

He and I had been returning from the home of one such witness when we stopped to view the fog-enshrouded battle monument. The woman, who insisted on anonymity, was the manager of an important civic-commercial organization in Point Pleasant.

Possibly the very first area witness of Mothman, she told us of a frightening phenomenon she and her father witnessed in 1961.

In the summer of that year she took her father out for a drive on Route 2. She braked the car when they saw what appeared to be a very tall man, in gray clothing, standing facing them in the middle of the highway. When they approached to within 100 yards of it, the figure suddenly spread a set of huge wings, filling the entire width of the road. The man, creature, or whatever it was, then zoomed straight upward.

Both were greatly frightened by the incident, turned and drove directly home. Her father wanted to report it to the police, but they finally decided to keep it to themselves, fearing ridicule if they let the story get out.

Nor did she tell, until this evening, of other puzzling events which took place at her home, located at Gallipolis Ferry, a few miles south of Point Pleasant. Hearing of Ben's interest in such cases, she came into the store one day, drew him into his office and first told him of seeing a brilliant, multicolored disc in the sky, on March 28.

That was not the thing that had alarmed her, however. Prior to the sighting, odd thumpings on the outside and roof of her house, occurring at three different times, had frightened her. At one time during the thumpings she looked out the window and saw a shadowy shape, suggesting a winged creature, float past it. She heard high-pitched beeping sounds, "somewhere between the cries of a bird and electronic noises", which seemed to emanate "from all around" her. Her house was on a back road, and she was often alone there during evenings because of her husband's work which often took him out of town overnight. Because of the incidents she moved to Point Pleasant, where Ben and I had interviewed her.

As we talked, Ben pointed out the similarity of her experiences to those of the Mallette couple. For several weeks after their encounter with Mothman, they were often awakened at night by loud hangings on the top of their house

trailer, and what they also described as "beeping sounds".

Another friend of his, who lived in Ohio, had apprised Ben confidentially of a frightening experience which took place on March 12, 1967, about two weeks previous—though he could neither give me the name of the witness nor introduce me to her.

A housewife was driving home from an evening church service with her daughter when a huge creature, much larger than a man, flew across the road in front of them. It had a wingspan of more than ten feet. Its body was white, and they saw long white hair streaming from the thing's head.

The family, Ben said, belonged to a small fundamentalist religious sect, and was very devout. They believed the creature was supernatural in nature, and was either Jesus Christ, or one of His angels.

They too reported puzzling events associated with the experience. Their telephone often rang, with nobody on the line, and sometimes did not function for brief periods. Their television set developed interference, when neighbors' sets worked all right, and they reported that in one instance "a Communist program" had been received on an otherwise unoccupied channel. They had also seen lighted objects land in a gravel pit about a mile from their house.

Ben started to change the subject, but was interrupted by the waitress. After we gave her our orders, Ben hit his fist on the table.

"Doggone it, Gray! There's something I want to tell you, but every time I think of it, I'm interrupted, and it slips my mind !"

"I know how that is," I sympathized. "MY GOD!" I thought. "You know I'm supposed to be in Charleston tonight, taping a radio show with Hugh McPherson, and I completely forgot about it! What will I do? Perhaps I could call him up with some manufactured excuse, but I suppose I'll level with him and tell him I forgot about it. I can always point out, if he argues with me, how he forgot his bird (Hugh is the sole support of and trainer of two Mina birds) in a supermarket, cage and all, and was somewhat embarrassed after it had engaged in language unbecoming to the usual sedateness of the establishment."

I told Ben how I had been impressed, not only by the quality of most of the Mothman reports, but also by their quantity. I briefly reminded him of some of the other accounts which appeared in the press shortly after the initial sightings in mid-November, 1966.

For example, a man who would not identify himself because "people think those who see this thing are crazy" told The Point Pleasant Register that a large bird-like creature appeared in his yard the night of November 14. He

discovered the thing after his dog barked loudly. The creature flew upward and to the southwest. As it flew it appeared to be "cigar-shaped" and made a noise "like a Washington time signal…it had a motor or hum to it".

On November 18 two Point Pleasant volunteer firemen, Captain Paul Yoder and Benjamin Enochs, reported seeing a large bird fly across their car "like a white shadow". They were in the picnic area of the T.N.T. grounds at the time. "I'd say definitely this was a large bird of some kind," Yoder reported.

Kenneth Duncan, of Blue Creek, near Charleston, told The Charleston Gazette that he and some other men were digging his brother-in-law's grave on November 16 when something that "looked like a brown human being" flew by. "It was gliding through the trees and was in our sight for about a minute," Duncan declared.

Nor had sightings of bird creatures been confined to the Ohio valley area. Twenty-three-year-old George Wolfe, Jr., of Beaver Falls, Pa., said that while hunting in Enon Valley during the Thanksgiving weekend he had seen a "seven-foot tall bird that looked something like an ostrich".

He saw the bird in a cornfield seconds after he had fired at a pheasant which his dog had flushed.

"The bird ran. It did not fly," he told an investigator of the Congress of Scientific Ufologists. "I could see it dodging in and out among the trees. It didn't leap over the brush like a deer would do, but just zig-zagged through the trees, in a strange kind of sidewise motion.

I was so startled I didn't take a shot at it. It had a long neck and a round body with a plumed tail that reached high above its body.

"It had a grayish color and looked about seven feet tall. It was only about 50 feet from me when it stood up and began to run. My dog ran after it, but when Old Ringo caught up with it, he let out a howl. He ran back to me with his tail between his legs and he was howling and whimpering."

"I told Ben that Dr. Kenneth Parks, curator of birds at the Carnegie museum in Pittsburgh, said Wolfe's description of the bird led him to believe it was a Sandhill crane, which probably had escaped from a zoo, and had had its wings clipped while in captivity.

"Dr. Parks, we must admit, agrees with the opinion of Dr. Roger Smith of West Virginia University, who read the Point Pleasant reports and pointed to the Sandhill crane as the culprit."

"At least," Ben replied, "I think we've well established widespread

sightings of a bird or birdlike creature. But still it just doesn't seem to involve something natural. The reports usually have 'side effects', as I call them, such as UFO reports accompanying the Mothman accounts; and weird stuff like the hangings on the houses and the beeping noises—and, of course, annoyance of witnesses by unknown visitors."

We left the restaurant and walked toward the parking lot, where I would pick up my wagon which I had left there to ride in Ben's car.

He grabbed my shoulder.

"Don't look just now, but there's two people you should see."

I turned slowly toward the street.

Advancing toward the intersection was a tall, emaciated man, and a cheerful, short woman, both, I would say, in their late sixties or early seventies. They first appeared to be holding hands, but as they came closer I could see that they jointly held onto an object which they raised into the air between them.

"Don't laugh at them," Ben begged. "Although admittedly they are sort of odd, they are, I would say, two of the finest people in the area. I think you should meet them if only to see their weird 'scepter'."

They advanced to the intersection and suddenly the object they held shot up into the air, and they drew back to the curb. After a car went by, they spotted Ben, waved with their free hands, crossed the street and advanced toward us.

"This is William James Bateman, and his wife, Martha. I want you to meet Gray Barker."

Mrs. Bateman took the "scepter" as her husband shook hands with me. The object was indeed unusual. A long plastic stem which served as its handle culminated in a glass or plastic ball, about three inches in diameter. To this apex had been glued or somehow attached pieces of cut glass, dime store jewelry and objects appearing to be marbles.

"Tell Gray about your scepter," Ben urged the man.

"For years," Bateman began, "I have been in close contact with myriads of God's angels. Lately they have officially made Mrs. Bateman and me angels ourselves. They taught us how to make this scepter. It is a kind of 4-D television camera, and they can monitor its signals and look through it and see everything we can see, and experience everything we can experience. They deeply enjoy doing this, and they tell me that, for the first time, they can really see what is going on in the world."

The scepter, he claimed, contained "seventeen imported crystals", and was

the only one like it in the world.

"Anywhere between five and seven thousand angels, both good and bad, participate in everything pleasurable with my wife and myself, such as movies, television, and our favorite hobby, bingo games."

"Wait a moment," I remarked. "You mean you let the evil angels look through this thing too? Don't the good angels object?"

"Oh no. An unlimited number of angels can use it. At first we did not allow the evil angels, or devils, to enjoy it; but then so many of them begged us to let them look through that we finally assented. Then more and more of them asked to do so. They said they didn't realize that the world was so beautiful and that so many people were so good.

"Many of the devils, " Bateman explained, "live deep in dark caverns underneath the earth, and seldom see the light of day. They have been told that all the people on the surface were selfish and warlike and were great enemies of theirs. When they look through the secpter they change their mind."

He then came up with a staggering statistic (if only for its alleged conciseness!). There were, he said, 8,509 devils in our solar system. He and his wife deeply believed that by offering little kindness to the devils, ceasing to speak badly about them, and by showing them the advantages of changing and being good, they could make "good angels out of them".

"I know this may be contrary to your religious teachings," Bateman again addressed me, "but really it is not contrary to God. Jesus, while living here on Earth, was more concerned about the 'lost sheep' than he was about the people who had repented. If you've read your bible, you'll know that between the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus went down into Hell, where the devils live, deep in the bowels of the earth, and preached to what the bible refers to as the 'lost sinners' there."

The devils constantly demonstrated their appreciation of the concern the Batemans held for them, and for the privilege of looking through the scepter. Whenever there was danger about, or when the couple was about to step into dangerous traffic, the scepter, Bateman declared, would jerk up and down violently.

"When the green light comes on, or when the danger is over, the scepter gently pulls us forward."

We watched them as they departed, still jointly holding the weird device. They walked up the steep incline of the pedestrian walkway of the Silver Bridge, gradually vanishing into the fog which had lifted and obscured only the

towering part of the structure. It almost seemed they were rising into the spiritual world of their strong convictions.

Once again we walked toward our cars.

"You know," I told Ben, "the average person would call these friends of yours religious crackpots. I know they're odd, and I wouldn't want a steady diet of this sort of thing. But I believe they're more truly religious than most people. After all, why be so rough on the devils? You can always accomplish more with gentleness and love than you can with vituperation and negative thinking. If one were fairly decent to the devils, maybe he could convert them, as the Batemans are trying to do."

Ben smiled and laughed, and I could see he was both amused and impressed by my statement.

"Of course, this would be bad for the churches," I continued. "They'd go out of business if there were no more devils, and…"

"STOP!" he cried. "Let me tell it this time. This is what I've been forgetting every time I started to mention it."

I halted my religious harangue.

" 'The Curse of Cornstalk'. That's what I wanted to tell you."

His tone grew more serious.

"I related to you how chief Cornstalk and his son were murdered in cold blood, after he had been largely responsible for maintaining peace in the valley. A rare historical document relates that before he died he put a curse on the town. Just what sort of curse, the account does not state. But it does add that the curse was to last for two hundred years—approximately, that is, because he set the time in his own idiom, in terms of seasons, moons and so on."

"Do you think that these weird events—the Mothman sightings and the strange poltergeist-like phenomena—could be a part of the curse?" I half asked him, half asked myself.

"I don't know about that, and I really don't believe in curses—except perhaps for cases where the accursed deeply believes in the alleged spell and helps to bring the effects upon himself by his own negative actions.

"Still," he continued, "there are some facts which tend to back up the curse. For years the town was impoverished by disastrous floods, until the flood wall finally solved this problem. Even since then, however, the town has never prospered, while other communities up and down the river, with similar geographic and economic opportunities, have flourished.

“And I must level with you on one other idea of mine, which has haunted me ever since I heard about the curse from the Ohio University professor who came here to do research on the Indian wars.

“It’s really against my better judgment, but I still have this premonition. The feeling that, if there really is a curse, it has just about run its course. After that, everything will be all right for Point Pleasant. Still, with this feeling comes another—that of foreboding: that the Curse of Cornstalk, though the dead warrior’s anger has been almost satiated, has one last great hurdle to go. Sometimes I awaken during the night with the premonition of an impending catastrophe, though I have no clue as to what it will be. This would complete the curse, and finally, for all time, expiate the great wrong and the foul murder of the valiant man. At last, Cornstalk could rest in peace.”

CHAPTER 14

THE VOICE IN THE NIGHT

Jennings "Red" Beckley realized that his friend was "real weird", just as the other kids put it, yet he found the older man fascinating to talk with. He was a nearby Ravenswood building contractor with whom Red became acquainted when he worked for him briefly the past summer.

Also, he admired his friend because he lived alone and could have things pretty much as he pleased, including a sports car, ham radio equipment, a tape recorder, a stereo outfit and the like. He began visiting him frequently, and occasionally stayed over with him on weekends, not so much because of his interest in the gadgetry and being allowed to drive the car occasionally, but because of an unusual revelation the man made one night. Red noticed the flying saucer books and other unusual literature around the apartment, but was only mildly interested until his friend confided that he had not only seen the saucers, but actually had contacted and talked to their pilots. They took him for a ride in a saucer and flew him over all the Ohio river valley.

Red took one of the books home and it opened a new world for him. If there were people here from outer space, he thought, one ought to get to know them, for certainly they must be very highly advanced. And he was fascinated by the prospect of riding in one of the disc-shaped objects pictured in the book.

During his next visit he prevailed upon the man to reveal his method of contacting the space people. At first he refused, explaining that Red did not yet possess the "high spiritual vibrations" needed for such contacts. He did consent, however, to inform him further about the nature and philosophy of the space people, and to give him a brief description of their planet. Among many

details, he related that they were vegetarians and that he himself was seriously considering abandoning meat altogether so that he could better communicate with them and see them more often, though his doctor insisted on his having a high protein diet "to build up my system".

Apparently noting the receptivity Red displayed, the man finally promised that if he would come to Ravenswood every weekend for "occult studies" he could eventually reveal the secret.

Red took up the studies, but was amazed when he finally learned the simplicity of the contact process.

"When you want to contact them," his friend explained, "you can do this by thinking of orange leather. You have to imagine it very strongly. You have to almost see it. Then you create the mental attitude of actually feeling it, experiencing the smell of it; finally you imagine you are snapping it in your hands. You must do all this, however, in strict privacy, perhaps in your room at night before retiring."

Returning home excitedly, Red tried the process that same night. Although he got no results, he realized it might require several such experiments before he would be able to achieve the proper mental concentration. He repeated the process on three successive nights, early in the evening, before doing his homework. During two of the experiments he fell asleep and didn't awaken until morning.

On Friday the experiment had to be postponed, for word went around school that another "igloo" dance would take place that night in the old T.N.T. area. He must attend, if only to see the Ashley girl again. Although she had graduated the previous year, she had recently quit college, and still ran with the relatively small group that held the dances.

He caught a ride with the Everly boy. Driving into the T.N.T. area well after dark, they parked and then sneaked into a "posted" or forbidden section of the vast area, containing parts of the widely dispersed munitions complex which had been deactivated after World War II.

One of the "igloos", in reality an underground concrete bunker in which explosives had been stored, had never been sealed up. It was large enough to drive several cars into, but only one was needed—a car with a strong battery, for it would provide the lighting for the dance, to the music of a local station on a transistor radio.

Liberal amounts of soft drinks and beer provided refreshments and some of the older boys always had pints of whiskey in their jacket pockets. Though

usually nothing much happened except dancing and merriment, it was an unwritten law that if a couple retreated outside to a parked car, nobody would snoop around.

Red had a couple of beers before dancing with the Ashley girl. First they engaged in some small talk, then in suggestive banter. The Harris boy came over and offered them some orange gin. Both took swallows from the bottle. Red bought the rest of it from him at an outlandish price.

The girl, seemingly fired up with the gin, embraced him tightly, and her ample breasts, now quite firm, pressed against him. He had been laid five or six times, with two other girls, but they never excited him like this one.

He didn't envision much trouble getting her out to the car, for she seemed to be as hot as he was. Five or six guys had told him that she "put out", but always related this second hand; another friend, disappointed after a date with her, declared that she was just a "teaser", and wouldn't actually do anything.

She readily assented to his suggestion that they finish the bottle in the car and "do some necking", Once there, she giggled excitedly, then moved easily into the petting and cooperated madly in kissing. It was the first time a girl had stuck her tongue inside his mouth. At first he withdrew from it; then the second time he began to like it, and then it was maddening.

Finally, holding her tightly, he was kissing her wildly on the neck and beginning to explore downward with his hand when she screamed loudly and tore herself from him. She pointed toward the bushes.

"Mothman! I saw it! Get me out of here! Get me out of here!"

He was afraid the others might hear her and think he was raping her. So he grabbed her hand, and rapidly led her back to the "igloo". He thought it best to go along with the idea, and swear he saw the creature too, though somewhat more mildly, "only a flash of its eyes".

The Everly boy and his friend had to take two girls home early, and because that was his only ride home, Red reluctantly abandoned his intended conquest to go with them. They dropped him on their way.

He was rather disgusted. He had been all built up, and then she had seen this damned bird or creature. Once in his room, he threw his jacket across it into a corner, sat down and vowed to do his homework.

He pulled out the half empty bottle and began swigging at the remaining gin. He put down the homework, listened to the radio for a while, and then realizing it was very late, took off his clothes and got into bed.

(For the sake of absolute accuracy, I will quote verbatim the following from the taped interview made with Red, rather than report it as a third person narrative, as I have done above):

“I had just fallen asleep, when, I swear, a voice with a very odd accent boomed into my room, saying, 'What do you want?’ I sat up wide awake, turned on my light, and looked at my dog to see if he was aware of anything. He was still asleep.

“I lit a cigarette, and was thinking it must have been a dream, or that I had too much to drink, or that my imagination was playing tricks on me. After a few more drags on the cigarette I became convinced of this.

“Then, booming through the entire upstairs floor, the voice, still with the odd accent, said: 'Have you called us? What do you want?’ My first reaction was that I should say, ‘Shh, you’ll wake up the whole house!’ Again I looked at the dog which was still asleep; then (forgetting the reason I had wanted to see or talk to them) I replied:

“ ‘WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GOT BESIDES FLYING SAUCERS?”

“I waited in vain for an answer, and deeply regretted my crude remark. Finally, I got up and wrote this down on paper, but it was really unnecessary. I should have made some notes on the accent, for the next morning I remembered everything else except the odd accent.”

CHAPTER 15

THE DOG THAT SAW MOTHMAN

‘Yes, Maynard he saw Mothman, and you ask him, Old Pronto was nearly scared to death. You can ask the kids how he still sneaks under the bed.”

The woman ushered us into the three-room shack. Ben Franklin and I had again driven out to the remote area where we had heard of the flying saucer report which vied with the ’60’s in sophistication: a frightening contraption shaped like a Volkswagon!

The house was not dirty, but it was unkempt. Tattered articles of clothing were scattered about; childrens’ cutouts from mail order catalogs covered much of the floor, and the room had the appearance of general disorganization. We had been brought into a combination living room and bedroom, obviously where the three children slept in a dilapidated two-tiered bunk-type bed.

“This is Joe,” she introduced a boy of ten or eleven in bibbed overalls; “and this is Helen,” and she identified a scraggly, dirty little girl, with long, stringy hair, her bangs cut straight across. As the two children regarded us, evidently with some awe, the mother pointed to another girl, a large, overweight child of perhaps sixteen, her hair cut like that of a boy, and dressed in ill-fitting pants and shirt, probably her father’s.

“This is Emily. She isn’t too bright—so don’t expect her to be civil to you. Emily! Sit down there! But first go wipe your face (she referred to a dribbling from her nose which had accumulated on her upper lip)!”

Emily did not move from the corner into which she had retreated, but a wide smile came over her face. She suddenly sprawled down onto the floor, and from that awkward position continued to watch our every movement with

large brown eyes, which despite her obvious mental retardation, nevertheless appeared bright and alert.

"You've missed Maynard. He's at the ADC office, seeing about going to night school. The State is going to educate him, they say, and pay him for going. The ADC, that means the Aid for Dependent Children, is really going to help us out, and goodness knows we need it. As I tell Maynard, I don't know how we're going to get through this winter. It's taken two loads of coal so far, and now we have to see about getting another load. I can't keep this house clean, with the kids traipsing in and out through the mud. The more I tell them not to, the more they keep doing it!"

Knowing we were running late, and that Ben had an appointment back in town. I asked her to relate, even though second hand, just what her husband (and the dog) had witnessed.

"Well, I'll tell you just what he told me. Him and Bill Singleton were over there to Apple Grove, and on their way back they had car trouble—Emily! Go into the kitchen and wipe off your face! How many times do I have to tell you! —and as I was saying, Emory—Clarence—Joe (she recited three other first names before pronouncing that of her husband, a conversational trait I had noted among other people of the area)—I mean MAYNARD, saw this thing like a Volkswagon right smack in the middle of the road in front of them. Emily! Be quiet! Don't you know that I'm talkin'!"

The girl, who previously had contented herself either by watching us or carefully examining a broken piece of bric-a-brac, a plaster-of-Paris bird of the type one sees at a circus or carnival booth, had suddenly stolen the limelight. She chanted, in a sing-song minor key, and somewhat out of tune:

"O the hammers keep a ringin'
On somebody's coffin…
Way over yonder…
Way over yonder…"

"SHUT UP, BEFORE I KNOCK YOUR HEAD OFF!" the mother shrieked (although she constantly warned the children, she did not carry out any of her threats, and they no doubt were accustomed to the violent adjurations).

She continued her narrative. Apparently either wishing to stretch it out, or conforming to a style of verbalizing indigenous to the small community, she constantly interrupted the story with minor details unrelated to the report we had come to hear.

My attention strayed to the dog, which supposedly figured in the story, for

it had a habit of riding in the truck with the father and therefore also had witnessed the strange object. It was a fat, aged, white-whiskered creature, and it lay with its face near the pot-bellied, coal-burning stove, the small door of which had been opened to decrease the chimney draft and reduce the temperature in the overheated room.

Suddenly the dog awakened, whined and pawed its face spasmodicaly.

"Old Ponto's got too hot!" the boy explained.

"You lay so close to that stove, no wonder!" the mother cried out at the dog.

The boy and girl, apparently seizing an opportunity to gain attention, lifted the heavy animal and carried it to a rocking chair. Sitting side-by-side, they pulled Ponto onto their common lap. The annoyed dog did not appear to appreciate the rough handling, but nevertheless lethargicaly accepted the circumstance.

"Did you know," Helen addressed us, "that Old Ponto has one more toe than any other dog?"

At the same moment she smiled impishly, and her brother turned his earnest face toward us with such a pitiful expression that we could not ignore the question. Anyhow, the mother's narrative had been so often interrupted by various conversational sidetracks, such as referrals to the government, bad weather, and the neighbors, that the riddle the children imposed afforded a welcome relief.

"No, I didn't know that. Why is that?" Ben obligingly asked.

"Why, because of his name. You know he has ten toes, like any dog, And there's his name: #8216;Pon-TOE'!"

Joe's face broke into a smile, and both children shrieked and giggled.

"We fooled old Squint Eyes Fletcher on that yesterday!" they triumphantly added.

"Well, as I was telling you-LET ME TELL THIS OR THE OLD SCRATCH WILL GET YOU (the mother shouted at the children)! When George—Ed—I mean MAYNARD, saw this thing like a Volkswagon, only it wasn't a car at all for it took off straight up in the air-JOE, DON'T POKE THAT FIRE! IT'S TOO HOT IN HERE NOW! They killed the engine, or rather this thing must have killed the engine, and they just stopped dead there. Maynard's first thought was that this was one of them Air Force experiments, and that maybe he had seen something he wasn't supposed to see; and I guess they were getting scared, too. Now Maynard isn't afraid of anything, I'd say;

but when he came home that night I'll swear he was white as a sheet. That Ponto was scared too. He ran in the door like a streak of lightning, and ran under that bed right there, and I'll swear he wouldn't come out and wouldn't come out, not even when we tried to feed him his supper."

A frying and hissing noise interrupted her.

"Oh my lord, my meat's boiling over!" she exclaimed as she ran into the adjacent room.

"There's just too much for one woman to do around here," her complaining voice continued from the kitchen, as she remonstrated how her husband "just never comes home and dolesses* around".

The two children in the rocker took their mother's absense as an opportunity to regain our attention.

"We'll ask Old Ponto if he saw Mothman. Poor Old Ponto, poor old dog."

They patted him, with such a heavy barrage that his sleepy head moved up and down with the rough caresses.

Now, Ponto, didn't you see Mothman?"

They abruptly ceased the patting, but the sleepy creature continued to nod its head, in synchronization with the now absent strokes.

***A local term, obviously a contraction of "do less," and pronounced "DOO'-less."**

CHAPTER 16

BARBARA HUDSON

Barbara Hudson looked down past the rusting catwalks, the abandoned boilers and the maze of rooms gutted of their machinery. Except for the lively conversations below, it could have been a place far from human inhabitation or concern. Broken glass from the windows spread across the floor, and she looked out the empty panes, past the dead trees of winter, toward the Pleasant Point Resort, which was about a mile away.

Ever since she had seen the skyline of New York stretch long, then pass from view on the New Jersey turnpike, she had been in what seemed to her a new world. Since her early childhood in North Carolina, she rarely had an opportunity to leave the city.

"We're going to a 'mini-convention'," Jim Moseley had phoned her.

"A what?"

"It's really what we call a 'Mothman convention'. Instead of having a big UFO meeting as we did in New York, where thousands of people came, Timothy Green Beckley, Mark Samwick and myself have decided to spend the weekend at Point Pleasant, mainly just to relax, but also to investigate first hand some of the Mothman cases there. We'll meet Gray Barker, and a few other UFO buffs there, and have a real get-together. We thought you might want to join us. There will be plenty of room in the car."

Mary Hyre had guided the small party to the old abandoned T.N.T. plant. Even in the daytime, it looked spooky and foreboding, with its broken windows, cluttered grounds, and empty smokestacks standing as if in a "freeze frame" in an otherwise moving picture.

She wondered why she had left the luxury and comfort of the beautiful resort to come here to this rotting old building. And as she had seen its immense hulk loom up in the distance, she believed she would be afraid to go near or enter it. Although it had now been more than a year since the bird creature had been seen here, she was apprehensive that it might select that particular time to return, and that it might be hiding in there.

But now, after she was inside, she was less frightened of the building. It was like a vast, empty house, and she liked to imagine what kind of people had once been there. She enjoyed climbing, and soon had followed the flimsy catwalks to the very apex of the cavernous structure.

From there the conversations and shouts from below took on a hollow, muffled, unreal quality, as voices reverberated through the empty vastness. Looking downward, the interior was to her a marvel of light and darkness. The slanting and unusually intense winter sun shone through the broken windows, falling on the junk-strewn floors, making strong visual contrasts.

Such a shaft of light now caught two people on the landing two floors below. They were Ben Franklin and Ralph Jarrett, the latter a Charleston, W. Va., mechanical engineer. They appeared as if a spotlight had caught them on the stage of a darkened theatre. Jarrett advanced across the landing, holding two stiff wires, improvised from coat hangers. As he walked, the wires slowly spread apart, and she could see Franklin engaging him in animated conversation about the phenomenon. Jarrett had tried the same experiment outside, terming it a form of "dowsing", and explaining that the wires parted because of certain magnetic influences present in the area.

Behind some debris in a darkened corner, a pair of luminous eyes watched her movements, as she picked up something and screamed.

"I've found it! I've found it!" she cried, as she made a perilous descent down the rusting ladders as fast as she could.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," Ben Franklin told her. "Child, I know you would like to find some real evidence of Mothman, but this is only an ordinary feather. It is the feather from a pigeon. After the Mothman scare here, these pigeons, which used to live here in great numbers, suddenly abandoned the place. Lately, I'm told, they're beginning to return. There, for example…"

He pointed to a corner. There, in a circle of feathers, were the decaying remains of one of the creatures.

"This one probably was attacked by something, likely a wild animal."

She turned and ran, as fast as she could while avoiding stumbling over the

debris. On the ground floor she looked up, and could scarcely imagine that she had been brave enough to climb so high. She shuddered. What if she had fallen?

There was much that fascinated her, though something that depressed her about the empty powerhouse. Somehow it reminded her of the building in which she lived. Here, of course, there was only a physical emptiness; but she could imagine that many happy people once worked here and filled it with the noises of their conversations and industry. Where she lived, the building was even taller and more vast than this, and it was filled with living people instead of ghosts. They laughed, they quarreled, they lived and died. But still there was that emptiness, the breath-sucking vacuum, and a loneliness even greater than in this old T.N.T. plant.

The Recorder hid behind one of the old acid storage sheds. Although he, himself, had not seen Mothman, he believed that other people had sighted the creature; nevertheless he did not expect the great bird to show up in broad daylight.

He had brought his equipment to the acres of abandoned government-owned property which had contained the great munitions manufacturing complex during World War II. He had come there not with the hope of obtaining recordings of Mothman, but with the thought of getting down on film and tape the people who sought out the strange flying thing.

But the area, the atmosphere, in itself, had fascinated him. Somehow it was depressing, but compelling and exciting at the same time.

Because explosives had been manufactured here, the buildings, with their many separate functions, had been located widely apart over the vast acreage. The vestiges of once well-traveled roads still wandered through the old industrial complex.

As he had driven into the area and tried to find his way among the maze of decaying roads, he had first been impressed by the immense skeletons on the skyline—the steel and concrete frameworks of buildings, standing there like the ruins he had once seen in Peru. Like the lost cities, they held a certain kind of sadness: of loneliness, of emptiness, of one's wondering where all the people who had lived and toiled there had gone. It might be like this, all over the world, he thought, should there be an atomic war.

He made up and hummed music to accompany the panorama. He grabbed the movie camera, locked it in "on" position, and set it on the dashboard, to

record the passing ruins as he drove. Later he would project this film and hum the same theme.

His reverie was interrupted by a new black Cadillac, parked partly on the roadway, the first signs of any human inhabitation. He intended to wave and smile at the occupants, but as he swerved around them he noted that the two people, a man and a woman, were huddled low in the vehicle, as if hiding. With surprise he saw they were naked, and greatly agitated as his observance of them. He stepped on the accelerator and hurriedly moved on.

He drove close to one of the vast skeletons, parked, and walked among the ruins. It reminded him of a movie he had seen about the lost city of Angkor Wat, eaten up by the encroaching jungle after its people had mysteriously disappeared. This ruin, too, was being taken over by a jungle of undergrowth, trees and weeds. The concrete floor split as a plant, though delicate in appearance, thrust its way upward through a jagged crack it had made.

Set low among the trees, and almost hidden by underbrush was another building he wished to explore. He picked his precarious way through the thick bushes and peered into the black doorway. Then he ventured inside. His eyes were now adjusting to the darkness, and he could pick out shelves and compartments marked with various numbers and designations, but all of them empty. A sign outside had identified the structure as Acid Shack No. 3. But, so far as people were concerned, all was emptiness, except for signs of later interlopers, evidenced by the graffiti on the walls.

He heard noises from outside, and he was glad. His patience had almost run out. Except for the couple in the car, he had recorded nobody who might be looking for Mothman. But this was a wild cacophany of shouts, giggling and loud discussions.

Having cautiously moved through the darkness to a vantage point where he could look out the brightly illuminated doorway, he could now see the source of the confusion. A half dozen bedraggled children paraded on the road. They likely belonged to poor people of the neighborhood, for they wore obviously cast-down adult clothing, which, on them, produced a macabre effect. One of them had donned a tie, grotesquely and loosely tied around his neck, reaching almost to the ground. The tatterdemalion throng made up for its unattractiveness with its enthusiasm. The children were having a great time, as they left the roadway and gamboled among the ruins. One of them had a toy, make-believe camera, which he occasionally pointed at the others. Whenever he did this they would stop, make faces and contort their bodies, then continue

clambering over the ruins, taunting each other.

Some of them ran into one of the buildings that yet claimed walls and set up a cry, greatly amplified by echoes:

"Mothman! Where are you!" they yelled; then they began a loud moaning, which, augmented by the reverberations from the concrete structure, resulted in terrifying sounds. It would have frightened the Recorder, had he not also been saddened by it.

Only one girl was among them. More reticent than the rest, she hung back, as if afraid she actually might see the monster the others so bravely challenged and mocked. Finally she retired completely from the group, plucked the frozen seed pod of a once existent flower and examined it.

The children were now moving to another area, and the Recorder remembered the deep, uncovered well in that vicinity. What if they were to stumble into it? He estimated it had a drop of fifty feet to the water level, and was much deeper than that. When the property had been abandoned, these wells should have been covered, he reasoned.

Perhaps he should run outside and warn them, even if it might involve revealing his identity.

Barbara Hudson observed the utter sameness, as the miles of the Pennsylvania, then the New Jersey turnpike flashed by. The quiet farmlands of Pennsylvania had gradually dissolved to growing urbanization and industrialization as they progressed. Traffic grew heavier. Each trailer truck they now overtook became a repetition of the hundreds they had passed earlier. The rumble of the car, the harsh roar of air over the cracked side vent, and the cacophany of the rock and roll station on the radio grew to a hypnotic monotony, until the Pontiac seemed to stand still and the scenery rush toward and around it, reminiscent of the simulator employed in a driver's education class she had taken in high school. There, a projector had thrown a moving scene onto a wide angled screen, as the student reacted to the various hazards artificially approaching him by making correct driver responses.

"That was a great meeting," Timothy Green Beckley broke the silence. "I really didn't expect to see the creature, but after all, we talked with a lot of people who did see it."

"Yes," agreed Jim Moseley.

"I liked the way the people there were so friendly," Mark Samwick added, "and I also liked the old factories, what there was left of them."

“Here’s where Long John started out,” Jim reminded the group (he referred to Cartaret, N.J., the site of the WOR-Radio transmitter, from which John Nebel began his famous all-night all-talk show).

The earlier talk and gaiety of the beginning of their homeward trek had worn off. All three appeared to be very tired. They probably were looking forward to getting home, and catching up on their sleep.

Barbara then saw the beginnings of the city. The skyscrapers. The factories. The apartment houses, row on row. The suffocating sameness. The crowded madness.

She sat back and closed her eyes. Once again the spectre of the vast abandoned powerhouse came into her mind. She had feared its emptiness then. She had worried that the Mothman might jump from the cavernous depths of a rusting boiler. In her memory she was once again inching her way through the glut of broken window glass on the floor.

She unclasped her black hand which had secretly held the object for most of the twelve-hour trip, and looked at it again. The others would not notice this small idiosyncracy for they had taken to “acting the fool” (as they would say in North Carolina) again. Two of them parodied the old “Batman” television theme song, substituting and singing, “Mothman! Mothman! Mothman!” One of them discovered an inch of liquid in the wine bottle, and waved it high.

Barbara opened her hand wider to look more closely at the feather. It was white, mostly, with grayish tinges. When she held it at an angle it took on a metallic sheen. It was strong, yet delicate. Once home, she would put it away, and could take it out and look at it whenever she got into one of these moods.

She began humming. For the first time she could remember some of the melody the strange, gaunt man was singing. She had chanced to peer into a darkened corner of the old abandoned power plant and had seen him hiding there. He hadn’t seen her, she was certain, for he had been busily regarding the others on a lower level.

As he watched them, he quietly hummed and half sung the tune, which sounded something like the Gone With The Wind record. She couldn’t catch any of the lyrics—he sounded as if he were singing, “Loo-loo-loo,” instead of words. He was weeping, why she did not know.

CHAPTER 17

PSEUDOTRITON RUBER RUBER

The compelling visage, with its penetrating eyes, and a batrachian-like opened mouth displaying large teeth, confronted me in the darkness.

I let out a cry and fell backward into the water. My two nephews retreated wildly, then prepared for a counter-attack. Holding their battery powered lantern in front of them, they advanced, while chanting a song I confess I had made up and taught them:

"Dracula, Count Dracula
You're only a big bat!
Once we say the magic words,
You'll run just like a rat…

Joey and Donny stealthily approached, heroically to my rescue. I had thought up the little song when the children, aged 8 and 10 respectively, had been frightened by an old Universal horror film potboiler on TV.

Already a gaunt man, with a commanding and almost croaking kind of voice, had grasped me and was helping me from the stream, amid many apologies.

"I assure you, my friend, I am not Count Dracula. I am a professor, sir, at one of the leading colleges in a neighboring state. I am Professor Gross, and I am extremely sorry to have discomfited you!"

The bait hunt had for me come to an undignified end. An older brother had promised the two children a trip to the Sutton reservoir the next day, and they had enlisted me to help them seine for minnows and crawcrabs.

The watery search, in the small tributary of Cedar creek, had been delayed

until after nightfall by the sudden arrival of another relative and the screening of some home movies I had at last remembered to bring from Clarksburg to my brother's home in the country.

"And what are you seining for?: I finally got around to asking Professor Gross, who had sat down on the creek bank with us and was searching through a container.

"Pseudotriton ruber ruber, and I have found him!" he replied enthusiastically. He displayed a small salamander which looked just like so many of the small creatures we found in our bait.

"A what?" I asked.

"That's just a salamander," Joey corrected. "That's no 'roobey roobey' stuff. But that sounds real groovey!"

"Pseudotriton ruber ruber," Professor Gross repeated. "Oh yes, my dear young fellow, you are correct: this is a salamander, but a comparatively rare salamander for this area. I am doing research on the distribution of this particular species through West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and…(he paused) I'm sure this is utter nonsense to you and probably to most everybody.

"Maybe it's just that I'm—to use a term my students employ—'hung up' on salamanders. Or maybe I should say that it's 'my bag'. Anyhow I'm not as far gone as a colleague of mind, who discusses what he calls the occult tradition of salamanders when I bring up the general subject. He calls the salamander an elemental, or a god of the flame. Sometimes I think I should have stuck with my minor field, ornithology."

We invited Professor Gross into the house for some coffee while I dried out. Taking a lead from the mention of his friend who evidently was interested in offbeat subjects, and his own interest in ornithology, I asked if he had heard of the Mothman stories, and indeed he had.

"What about the West Virginia University professor—I believe he is Dr. Robert Smith," I inquired, "who said that Mothman was probably a Sandhill crane?"

He remained silent for many seconds, as an ecstatic smile softened his hard facial features.

"Ah, a most beautiful bird, indeed!"

The batrachian voice took on a muted quality, as he described the creature:

"It stands almost as tall as a man, with its feathers a slate gray. Yes, I suppose it might be mistaken, in the dark, for a monster of some sort. But that is not likely. The bird is rarely seen east of the Mississippi, except in Florida. It

breeds and lives mainly in Canada—though I do hear now that the population is increasing in the Midwest. They would not winter here of course; instead they would go to a warm climate. Their winter habitats are mainly reported in Southern California, in Mexico, and along the Gulf Coast, in that order."

"What about the red, hypnotic eyes the witnesses reported?" I asked him.

"Oh I don't know about 'hypnotic'. That might be the imagination of the witnesses. The crane's actual eyes are not large, but there is a large, bright red fleshy ring around them, something like a turkey gobbler's snout. I suppose that car lights shining on the bird could reflect from the big red circles around the eyes. They wouldn't necessarily be reflective, but still this could be misinterpreted by a frightened person."

Although the Sandhill crane flew at a relatively fast rate of speed, the professor pointed out that it certainly couldn't approach the speeds reported in some of the Mothman accounts he had read.

"The Sandhill would not attack a person or follow a car, to my knowledge, though if you cornered him he could be very fierce.

"Very fierce. Very fierce," he repeated. "It has a long dagger-like beak which can become a dangerous weapon when the great bird is cornered and fighting for its life. Many hunters have found this out when their dogs have attacked these birds and been wounded or killed."

My mind flashed back to the account given to me by the manager of a Clarksburg shoe store, who had reported one of the few daytime encounters with Mothman.

Tom Ury said goodbye to his mother, Mrs. Frank Ury, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Dorothy Rhodes, both of Point Pleasant, and again expressed regrets that his wife had not been able to spend the Thanksgiving holidays with them. Deeply involved in a civic project, she had finally decided that its importance was so great that she must reluctantly sacrifice the visit back home.

Ury warmed up his new convertible and fretted briefly about the grime that had accumulated on it over the weekend. He supposed, as it had been with his previous cars, that he wouldn't mind so much about dirt after the novelty of the sleek machine had worn off.

Traffic was virtually non-existent in Point Pleasant. The stop-light at the bridge, deliberately set slow in order to disgorge the traffic from the huge suspended structure which seemed to stretch almost into the sky, now seemed to be slower than ever. Taking advantage of the delay, he pushed the stick into

“park”, loosened his seat belt and crouched to untie his right shoelace.

“Darn!” he thought audibly. “I work in a shoe store and I fit up dozens of people each day. I only hope I fit them better than I fit myself.”

He kicked the shoe off and worked his toes in relief, vowing to drive home comfortably, without replacing the “killer”. He usually crossed the Silver Bridge and drove up the Ohio side to Parkersburg, where he could take Route 50 East home to Clarksburg. But today he had promised to stop briefly in Lakin, on Route 62, on the West Virginia side, to briefly visit a friend who had just moved there. He really should be in a hurry to drive back home, but he was off for the entire weekend, and weekends at home, particularly those following holidays, tended to depress him.

He turned on the radio and searched the dial. The strongest signal in the area emanated from Marietta, an “all country” station, broadcasting Nashville records, and he hated it. But it was better than nothing, and the song, Almost Persuaded, one of the better country music tunes, was fairly tenable. The station broadcast news every half hour, and he was anxious to hear about Viet Nam.

But instead of the news, a farm market report came on, and he was regaled by the price of hogs on the eastern Ohio market. He turned off the radio.

The crooked roads prevented his letting the convertible out to test its speed again. He wished he were on Route 7, on the Ohio side.

Coming out of a bend into a relatively straight stretch of road, Ury noted a large field to his right, probably employed for grazing in the summer, but now barren and sere. He looked at the wooded area several hundred yards across the field. Suddenly an object appeared from that direction, rising slowly “like a helicopter”, he said.

Curious about the object, he slowed the car, and peered through the rain covered window. The thing apparently was a huge bird, though he had never seen one that large.

“I know you may think I’m crazy when I tell you about this thing,” he presaged his report to me, “but I’ve never had such an experience. I was scared, I tell you. Really scared!”

His facial expression, and his entire demeanor, indicated that at least for a moment he was reliving the puzzling and nerve-shaking affair.

“After it came up out of the woods, it veered over my car, and began to go around in circles—I’d say about the height of two or three telephone poles.”

His next reaction was one of fear. He stamped at the gas pedal, and the

powerful engine, in an orgasm of exploding fuel, pressed him against the seat as the car accellerated. At 70 he let up, for this section of road was crooked and substandard. He knew he was pressing his luck at the wheel, but just "had to get away from that thing!"

He had a definite impression that it was hostile, and the feeling that it might come down through the top of the convertible.

"I've never had that feeling before," he told me. "A weird kind of fear. That fear gripped you and held you."

His look at the thing had been brief, as he had seen it arise from the woods and speed toward him; but in those few seconds he had seen enough to convince him that it was "unnatural", as he put it.

"I've seen lots of big birds. I've been to zoos. I'm rather interested in birds, but I've never seen anything like that.

"It was a grayish-brown color; I'd say it was six feet in length, and that the wing span must have been at least ten feet. Its legs were folded under it."

To Ury, the body appeared to be too large in relationship to size of the wings.

"Somehow," he added, "the best way I could explain it would be to say that the whole thing just wasn't right. I know that may not make sense, but that's the only way I can put into words what I felt."

He did not see any beak, nor any eyes.

The outside swirled by in a blur. He realized that he was approaching 80, and, coming to his senses, reasoned that if Mothman didn't "get him", an accident surely would. And he couldn't be certain that the creature was still above the car.

The peaceful expanse of the Kirkland Memorial Gardens, with its neat landscapeing, its white rows of tombstones and occasional mausoleums, swung into view around the bend. Although it was a beautiful place, and he usually enjoyed passing and looking at it, at this moment it served to further impress him of the danger of his speed. He instinctively let up on the accelerator, and as he slowed, his eye again caught the outline of the huge bird, as it veered off, apparently abandoning chase and heading toward the river at his left.

Mothman had stretched its great wings and soared southward. Whatever the creature had been, it had shown up in St. Albans, W. Va., the next night, November 26, and there gripped Mrs. Ruth Foster in its mystical and compelling gaze.

Supper had been delayed, for her husband was late in getting home. He had

worked overtime at the small fabricating plant, and she didn't mind such an inconvenience when it would mean more pay that weekend. Though the family lived frugally, she found it difficult to make ends meet.

As she finished the dishes, Mr. Foster glanced at the wall clock. It was five 'til eleven. She hadn't realized it was that late. The clock was near the kitchen door, and it reminded her to look out and check on the weather.

The view outside, usually depressing, with its rows of dingy, nondescript houses, most of them in need of repair, and a garish neon sign over a bar, would be even starker on this cold November night.

She didn't open the door, for it was one of the "old fashioned" kind with a window at the top. She pressed her face to the cold glass, then recoiled in horror.

Looking directly at her was an awful thing, with huge eyes: red, bulbous, glowing more than reflecting. Even though she had the compelling desire "like it hypnotized you" to continue looking into the eyes, she escaped their gaze by covering her eyes and screaming.

Mr. Foster ran from the living room.

"Mom! What's wrong!"

"God help us! It's the devil outside!"

He peered through he glass.

"But there's nothing out there. You look again."

She could hardly bring herself to comply, but George's presence assured her. Again she fearfully pressed her face to the window.

The thing was gone. Outside was the same dreary street, the cold, depressing, drizzling rain, and the many waste baskets and garbage cans, not yet taken inside by the neighbors after Wednesday's pickup.

Still, she was certain she had seen this devil. She began to recall the few other details, besides the eyes, she had hurriedly noted. It must have been taller than her husband, who stood about 5'10", for she remembered she had looked upward at the eyes. She also remembered a white body with what she termed "close feathers". A huge set of folded wings and a "peculiar face" were the only other details she could recall.

Her sister, who lived in the adjacent house, suddenly appeared at the door, again frightening Mrs. Foster, not yet recovered from her initial shock. She banged on the door.

"Let her in," George urged, and Mrs. Foster told her in halting phrases what she had seen.

"I'll sic Old Ringer after it," her sister promised, and ran back home. Mrs. Foster could hear her calling the dog.

"Here, Ringer! Here, Ringer! Here, Ringer!"

She reappeared at the door.

"That cowardly dog! He won't come out! I guess he's fed too good. That hound is his under the dresser, and he won't come out for nobody!"

At about eight the next evening, a neighbor girl, 13-year-old Shelia Cain, was going to a neighborhood store with a friend and came running home screaming. Passing an auto junkyard, they saw a huge bird-like creature standing in front of one of the skeletonized vehicles. They described it as "gray-and-white-looking", and it, too, displayed glowing eyes. They saw no other details, and they also emphasized the red eyes, which "seemed to stare right through" them.

I regarded Professor Gross more carefully while he had cake and coffee. He gave me the impression of a man totally devoted to his disciplines of research, but who had neglected some of the niceties of life. He wore a suit which did not fit. Wading boots added to the oddness of his appearance. Although I tried to draw him into other conversational areas, he limited his comments to only the subjects in which he was apparently deeply interested: biology and ornithology. Nor did he talk down to us, as he continually interspersed his discourses with scientific and technical terms I could not come to grips with. Yet he seemed to fascinate Joey and Donny, who sat on the floor before him with rapt attention, though I knew they understood little of what he was saying. Maybe this was because he directed most of his conversation to them. Anyhow they remained completely quiet, and almost motionless, a condition rare for the two boys.

I assumed the Professor had no children, and had never married, for he wore no rings of any kind. As I was speculating on this matter, Joey breaking his silence, asked the question I had civilly withheld.

"Do you have lots of kids like my dad has (he is one of a very large family)?"

"Seven chaps, seven chaps (he tended to repeat key phrases), but they're all older than you. One's a doctor, one's in the space program, and the others, all girls—well, they all got married.

"Interesting bird, this Sandhill crane," he switched the conversation.

"The cry of this bird is a veritable voice of nature, untamed and

unterrified. Its uncanny quality is like that of the loon, but is more pronounced because of the much greater volume of the crane's voice. Its resonance is remarkable and its carrying power is increased by a distinct tremulo effect."

We listened, open-mouthed to his croaking voice, which suddenly seemed appropriate to his description of a creature which he evidently admired greatly for its beauty and courage. I closed my eyes and pictured myself in a lonely, wooded area, lighted only by a summer moon, listening to the great bird as it cried from the empty distances.

"Often for several minutes after the bird has vanished, the unearthly sound drifts back to the listener—like a taunting trumpet from another world."

CHAPTER 18

THE EMPTY BED

It had been on the Saturday night following the first Mothman sightings that Ida Wentworth had moved out, bag and baggage, taking the dog along, but leaving her husband, Frank behind.

Beyond initial puzzlement and dismay, Frank reasoned that her exit would, after all, be a great relief. Although Ida was a good cook and housekeeper, they had never got along well, and she had constantly nagged and shrieked at him. Practically nothing he ever did pleased her.

He did experience a great relief the first three days of living alone. He didn't make inquiries about her whereabouts. This would only serve to aggravate the neighborhood gossip, and he was quite certain that she had gone across the river to Middletown, and was living there at his son-in-law's. He could telephone her, but that would give her too much satisfaction. They had been in a particularly bad argument the night she left, and he felt she would return, once her anger wore off and she got tired of living away from home.

After a week, however, he began to re-examine the situation. She had not yet returned, and despite Ida's shortcomings, he felt that he definitely missed her.

There had been the times when she was in a good mood, mainly on Sundays, when they came home from church, or when relatives or friends were visiting them. And he was tired of eating out and fixing his own meals.

He did have the comfort of believing that her leaving was certainly not his fault. Her constant criticisms had little basis in fact. For instance, she had often lectured him about "getting ahead". He had what most people of the Point

Pleasant community considered a good job: he drew about $150.00 per week, after deductions, and usually added overtime to that. He had held the same job for twenty years and made reasonable advancement, though his position wasn't of executive nature, and he had progressed about as high as he could expect to go with the company. He considered himself a good provider. They owned a nice house and farm in adjoining Jackson County, though they preferred to live near Point Pleasant, he close to his work, and Ida near her friends in the city. He was able to provide a modern and pleasant apartment, part of a four-unit structure, shared with two other tenants and the landlady, who listened to all of Ida's complaints about him and tended to side with her most of the time.

Finally a month, and then six weeks passed, without Ida's returning, and Frank adjusted himself to the notion that she probably never would come back. After a year of living alone, he had almost given up the idea altogether.

After work, December 16, 1967, he decided to stop in town and have a few beers with some of his buddies before driving home. He felt satisfaction in being able to do this without worrying about being home at a given time. He would have some soup and a sandwich and thus avoid the task of fixing supper for himself.

He parked his '65 Fairlane across the street, put in a nickel which would keep the meter going until 6:00, and entered the bar.

His crony, Jerry West, one of the few customers in the establishment, beckoned for him to join him at a table where he was slowly consuming a bottle of Black Label.

"Good to see you, Jerry! How's the old man?"

Frank referred to the skipper of the river boat on which his friend worked. This was usually good for a conversation, for Jerry always liked to commiserate with him about the evil man who was his immediate boss. The skipper couldn't possibly be all that bad, Frank knew. After all, Jerry had admitted he had many opportunities to change boats, but preferred to stick on this one—though to hear him tell it, his superior would make the fictional captain Bligh appear almost humane. Frank never considered himself a good talker, usually preferred to sit and listen. He knew Jerry would launch his usual tirade against the captain, and he would be asked if he thought Ida would ever return, or to speculate where she might be living.

"That bastard's gettin' as crazy as a loon!" Jerry exploded requiring only Frank's brief question to trigger his recriminative monologue.

"You know what he did today? He had one of these magazines and he read

about these flying saucers in it. He kept saying that too many people were seeing these things, for them not to be real. Then he told how he had seen one, a weird light that jumped up and down.

"Well, so far, that's not too bad, but knowing him, you'd have to realize that most anything he'd say, except for running the boat, would be wrong. You see, he next got onto this Mothman tale. He said he believed the people around here had really seen the thing, and that me and the mechanic had better stop drinking and 'whorin' around', as he put it, and that this Mothman was an angel of God out to scare us into doin' better.

"Now, Frank, let me ask you. You know I drink beer and sometimes I get a jug of moonshine from those river people down in Cabell County. But you've never seen me when it's got the better of me, have you?"

Jerry didn't wait for an answer.

"And as for women, you know I keep myself moral. I'm not going to let myself be blackguarded by any half-crazy riverboat captain who believes in flying saucers and the devil's angels, particularly when he accuses me of something I don't do…"

Frank's mind wandered. Again, he realized he felt so comfortable around Jerry because once his friend had started his tirade, he need make no conversational responses, and only half-listen. It was something like talking to Ida.

He sincerely doubted if the captain were as bad as he was made out to be. Jerry had never changed jobs because, as he put it, "I wouldn't want to subject any other good man to such an unreasonable skipper."

The captain came up constantly in any conversation one had with Jerry. He probably secretly enjoyed the real or imagined mental anguish he suffered on the boat, and he suspected that his friend, whose father had died while he was a small boy, was reacting to the captain much like a boy often reacts to his father. Jerry was in some ways a strange one: he had never married, was apparently afraid of women, was particular and fastidious, sometimes acting almost like a woman, especially when he spoke out against his boss.

Unencumbered with much responsibility in the conversation, Frank's mind went back to Ida, a subject which had been on his mind most of the day.

Compared to Jerry's likely imagined persecutions, his had been more real. In reality, he mused, he had been a truly henpecked man.

When they married, Ida had been only a fair-looking girl, rather raw-boned and plain. Her sharp nose, which he hadn't greatly noticed then, had, in later

years, seemed to grow, and to suggest a kind of beak. He had often looked at her and mentally transfigured her into an old hen, pecking at him in great frenzy.

But he had put up with her faults, and, he supposed, he was really sorry when she left him. Maybe his relationship with Ida had been something like Jerry and the captain; perhaps he had actually enjoyed the naggings, her constant criticisms, and her general failure as a wife.

Frank remembered he had really entered the bar with the idea of having several beers and deliberately getting "high", something he rarely did. Once he had finished half of the first bottle, however the thought of getting drunk suddenly became repulsive to him. He said goodbye to Jerry, with the excuse he had to see a friend at the service station, circled the block and drove to the corner. He really only wanted to pick up a can of lighter fluid and go home.

He recognized a young man, checking the oil in his Chevy, as the Scarberry boy, one of the four people who had first reported seeing the so-called "Mothman" creature. He remembered the captain's remarks, and was about to approach Scarberry and ask him about the matter, but then he remembered hearing that the boy had told people he no longer wanted to talk about it.

He had known Scarberry when he had been employed briefly last summer, on a part-time basis, for the firm he worked for. He had been a good worker, whom his boss had described as "truthful and reliable". He had laid him off with great reluctance when the seasonal work ended.

He was ready to bring up some other conversational topic with the boy when he heard a loud rumble from behind. He turned and looked toward the bridge, as Scarberry remarked. "Hey, that sounds like a real fender bender!"

Occasionally rush-hour traffic would pile up on the bridge and the trailer truck would lose its brakes on the steep incline descending from the middle of the span, smashing up several cars ahead.

But the rumbling grew louder, as suddenly as it had begun. He saw two people, who were just driving up onto the bridge, abandon their cars and run down off the incline.

Then, the entire towering structure, which had risen above Point Pleasant in a tower of rusty steel, slumped and during an unbelievable second or two, crumbled and disappeared!

The rumbling stopped, and a momentary silence ensued. As yet, Frank didn't realize, or didn't quite believe, what had occurred.

"The bridge! It went down!" the station attendant yelled.

Frank ran with the small group of people, who happened to be in that section of town, toward the river. He followed them up the approach, still standing, like an abandoned ski-launch platform.

He envisioned the terrible scene he would regard when he looked over into the river, but apparently, as it was with the others, a perverse curiosity commanded him to look.

The scene that awaited him was little like he or the others expected.

A great silence.

The two great bridge abutments stood like mute giants in the middle of the river as the muddy waters whirled around them. He spotted one trailer truck floating downstream a man standing on top, waving and obviously shouting for help. On the distant Ohio side, murky and now beginning to be shrouded by evening haze, he could see a great deal of activity, with people apparently trying to extract victims trapped in the twisted steel of that part of the span which had fallen on the river bank.

But across the great muddy expanse of the river itself there was—nothing. The enormous superstructure, as well as the vehicles and people who had been on it, had vanished, without a trace, into the deep waters below. It was almost as if nothing had happened, and the same scene which would confront spectators for months to come, as they stood on the river banks and stared at the empty vastness.

Frank turned, ran from the bridge and forced his way through the crowd that seemed to have appeared from nowhere, pressing toward the scene of the tragedy.

For an overpowering idea had come over him, and he fought and pushed his way through the people, hoping that the one thought which obsessed him wasn't true.

He knew that Ida had selected this very hour to return, and that one of her relatives in Middleport had been driving her home. What if she had been on the bridge? Would she be dead now? Would she be desperately trying to claw her way out of a sunken automobile, deep in the blackness?

"Oh God!" he shouted. "Don't let her die! Oh God! Oh God!"

He ran to Ball's restaurant and into the telephone booth. He would call the apartment. If Ida answered—oh, if she only would!

He listened for the dial tone after dropping the coin. The phone was dead. He hung up, dropped it again, and waited. It occurred to him that the bridge collapse had broken some of the lines, or that perhaps everybody, just as he,

was trying to call and had overloaded the circuits.

He jumped into the car and slowly made his way through the confusion of traffic and pedestrians. An ambulance careened around the corner, and almost hit him. He turned onto Route 2 South, meeting a line of stalled traffic, delayed by an accident. Some person had been struck and a tall aged man with a strange stick with a ball on top of it waved the object wildly and gesticulated with his other hand.

At Henderson the traffic thinned. Temporarily regaining his senses, he considered how illogical his actions were. She had been gone for more than a year, and obviously had no intentions of returning. Even if she did anticipate returning, there would be only one chance in several million that she would have been on the bridge when it went down. The odds against it were fantastic.

Yet the mental fixation remained. Again he was certain she had returned, whether or not she had crashed with the bridge. He couldn't explain his strong emotion, for surely his love for her, if there had ever been such a thing, had diminished until he had been glad to get rid of her. But somehow, despite all this, he knew she was home or trying to get there, and the prospect filled him with a blind emotion which, try as he might, he could neither explain nor control.

He swung the car into the driveway, where his garage was blocked by a taxi with Ohio plates. He was right! She had come back! He ran around the walk to his side of the building, and surely enough, his door was ajar.

"Ida! Ida! You don't know what happened! The bridge went down. But you're safe! You're here!"

The door opened into the living room. It was just as he had left it that morning, without any sign of Ida's belongings. Perhaps her luggage was still in the taxi. But there had been no driver in it. Perhaps they had just arrived and the driver was here somewhere in the apartment, helping her with the luggage.

But the appartment was deathly silent, just as silent as the empty scene of the muddy river which had swallowed up all the people.

They must have taken the things into the bedroom. Surely enough, looking through the narrow hallway, he noted the door was open. Perhaps he shouldn't appear to be eager to see her, for after all, it would mean his forgiving her constant naggings, and all the unpleasant years that had spanned their marriage.

As he gently pushed the bedroom door fully open, he was temporarily puzzled, for somebody, apparently Ida, was in the bed, though of somewhat larger bulk than she. A maddening thought crossed his mind, as he remembered

the taxi. Both Ida and the driver were in bed together! He would jerk off the covers and expose them! His anger grew. He would kill the man! He advanced slowly toward the bed, and when he saw an oscillating movement beneath the covers he knew his suspicions were correct.

Before he could reach the bed, the covers flew back and a huge grayish form rose from it. His anger and jealousy turned to fear as he backed, toward the door, and vainly searched for the light switch while his eyes remained riveted, hypnotically, on the thing before him.

Red flashing eyes burned into his. Then with seeming confusion, and a flapping and gurgling sound, the thing tumbled sidewise to the floor, flapped again, upset a lamp, and then righted itself unsteadily. He retreated to the living room, tripped on the edge of the rug, and fell. As he was getting up, hoping to run and escape from the incomprehensible horror in the bedroom, it waddled through the door. He noted another facial feature besides the eyes: It had a long sharp beak which slanted downward, almost corresponding to a nose. It fell again, as it had in the bedroom, again flailing its wings, this time hitting the TV and knocking it off the stand. The set crashed into the book case with a loud noise as the picture tube imploded.

The great bird—that was as close as he could describe it to himself—again righted itself, leaped toward the large picture window, and with a crashing and splintering of glass, disappeared.

"Oh Lord Jesus!" he cried. "Deliver me! The world is coming to an end!" He kneeled, covered his face and sobbed loudly.

There was a banging on the wall and shrieking from next door.

It was the landlady, and that was what she always did when there had been loud arguments in his apartment. This had usually halted their altercations, for Ida deeply respected the other women.

Suddenly she appeared at the door.

"Shame! Shame! You're no good! It's no wonder Ida could never put up with you! Look what you've done to your color TV! My God, you've broken the window! That just shows you, Frank Wentworth, what drinking can do to a man!"

He continued to hold his head in his hands and sob.

"My Lord, you've busted the plumbing too!" and she ran past him into the bathroom.

The latter remark shocked him to his senses, and he then noticed the trail of muddy water, intermingled with bits of dirt which crossed the floor to the

broken window. He ran into the bedroom where the floor showed the same signs. The bed was a mess. Filthy with mud, it looked as if gallons of water had been poured over it.

AFTERWORD

Summer had come to Point Pleasant. Mrs. Ralph Thomas took the two-year-old child by the hand and walked her into the vegetable garden. Lately Mrs. Bennett had brought Betty to visit fairly often, and Mrs. Thomas was grateful.

"Look, honey, how bright and green is the sweet corn."

"Green!" the child cried, then babbled something unintelligible. She pointed to the sunflowers, which were just beginning to bloom at the side of the garden.

"Do you want to see the sunflowers, honey? Let's walk over there. My, you're getting to be a big girl. You can run and play on your own."

She grasped the sunflower and drew it down so that the child could examine it. Betty laughed as she touched the large orange petals.

Never could Mrs. Thomas remember a spring so wildly beautiful. There had been a good deal of rain, and the season had been earlier than usual. That probably was the reason. It seemed her garden was doing its best in many years. The flowers, which she cultivated with a zeal almost equal to that lavished upon the vegetables, were larger, brighter. Maybe it was just the season, but since April she had been filled with a beautiful tranquil calm. It was as if she knew that many pleasant and happy days would soon come. She had taken a great interest in the Bennett baby and had watched it grow from the infant to a small girl now able to walk and talk with her. She was a bright child, much ahead of her age.

Something zoomed past her face with a loud buzzing noise. The little girl screamed and pointed.

"That was just a June Bug. He's large and has a bluish-green shine to him, and two little whiskers coming out of his head. Don't be afraid of him. He's one of God's creatures."

Then Betty, as she lately was more frequently doing, put a short phrase together, and despite her age she spoke with remarkable clarity.

"Where is God?"

This was a difficult question, even for a lay minister who had been faced with the same queery many times. She hesitated to point to the sky, and say, "in heaven", for that probably would just bring more questioning.

"Where is God?" Mrs. Thomas repeated, and paused as she thought.

"Well, I suppose you'd have to say, dear child, that God is everywhere: in front of you, behind you, up in the sky, down in the earth and all around you. God is tremendously large. A part of him is in every bird that flies, in you, in me, and throughout this lovely garden.

"Here."

She plucked a flower and gave it to the child.

"He is in this flower also."

The little girl pressed the daisy to her lips.

"I love God!" she exclaimed.

Scoutmaster James Park supervised the noisy youngsters, now and then stepping in to reorganize their play. He then decided to let them throw the shot-put, for they hadn't done this the past few Saturdays.

He had been glad to get his "gold ball" back from Mr. White, who found it in his back yard after an orange light flew over his house. He had tended to connect the two matters and believed it to be from space. One of the scouts threw the shot-put and lost it in that vicinity. The resulting publicity created quite a commotion in the small Ripley community, and many people, he believed, were genuinely disappointed when they learned that the bright object was in reality a large ball bearing, coated with brass to increase its weight and diameter. Park had created the "gold ball" during off-duty time at the Kaiser Aluminum Company plant at nearby Ravenswood, where he was a maintenance mechanic.

The incident had brought him unwanted publicity. The papers referred to him as "Mr. Universe", for that indeed had been the title bestowed upon him twelve years previous when he captured first place in the international Mr. Universe contest in London. "He has long since abandoned his body-building exercises," one paper stated, "but still holds a great interest in building the bodies and characters of young people—hence his work in scouting."

He had feared the publicity might make him appear ridiculous, but instead,

the people of the community, who previously took little notice of him, began treating him more warmly, and for a while he once again felt like a celebrity.

He watched the boys playing. When he first took the position, he tried to keep up with them, but soon realized that his body was no longer young, and that he had let himself get out of shape. So he no longer tried to play as hard as they.

The boys played roughly, but in good sport. He hoped they would always find a way to physically and mentally compete with one another in the same healthy spirit. He hoped that by the time they became men they would, along with others, find ways to conquer the monsters of violence and war.

Conversation from downstairs awakened Jimmy Jamison. His parents let him sleep later, now that school was out; but this was much, much later, he could tell by the sun.

He discerned two male voices, that of his foster father, and of another man with a deeper voice. The conversation sounded argumentative, though not angry.

His foster mother entered the room, with a strange look on her face, one he had never seen before. She seemed to be very glad, but nevertheless very saddened at the same time.

"Let's get up, Jimmy, and get yourself looking real nice and your face scrubbed. There's somebody here to see you."

"A policeman!" Jimmy shuddered.

"No, boy, nothing like that. You'll be very glad. Now let's get dressed, and you be sure to brush your teeth."

Jimmy drew on his "mod" pants, quickly donned his socks and shoes. This was somebody who had come after him. He knew that for certain. It had happened so many times before. He liked these parents better than all the rest. If he were going to be taken by new ones, perhaps they would be mean.

"Come on, Jimmy, I want you to meet somebody," the woman urged. "Come on downstairs."

He crept down the staircase, staring apprehensively toward the source of the strange voice. Half way down, he stopped and gazed at the wiry, black-haired man, dressed in a kind of uniform. He was not a policeman, not a soldier. In fact he looked something like the television repairman.

Jimmy froze. He stared at the man, who now was rising, and who, himself, appeared to be somewhat frightened. Jimmy took one more step, then once

again held the man in his gaze. A flicker of a smile came over the man's face.

Then Jimmy knew where he had seen the man. He was the man in the picture! He made a motion as if he were about to hold out his arms. Jimmy stumbled down the staris and ran to the man and jumped into his embrace.

"He knows me! He knows me!" the man shouted.

"This is your real father," the woman explained in an odd emotionless, almost mechanical voice. "He's been away for a long time, but he has finally been able to come back for you. He will take care of you, boy, and you will be very happy."

Then she suddenly ran from the room and his foster father followed her.

"Some day I may be able to tell you," his dad said, "all about why I have been away from you so long. But now, I have come to take you with me. We're going to California, where I have decided to live. It's a beautiful place and you will like it. Mrs. Sponaugle has already packed some of your things, and a little later she'll get all of your things out of your room."

"Is this our car?" Jimmy asked, as they drove toward Parkersburg?"

"No, this one belongs to a Mr. Hertz, the fellow you've seen on television who puts you in the driver's seat."

Jimmy laughed.

"Back home, I have a big Mercury station wagon, and it's a bright, fire engine red. In just no time you'll be big enough to drive it yourself, and I'll teach you and we'll get you your driver's license, and then you can help your old dad drive."

Jimmy looked at him again. He was not "old" at all. He was somewhat older than the guidance counselor, but not as old as the principal. He was not fat, like the coach. Although he was not a huge man, Jimmy would bet his muscles were mighty large; but he couldn't see, under the uniform.

They turned off Route 2, at a sign which pointed to an airport, and drove to the terminal.

"Are we going to get on a Lake Central airliner—I'll bet we are!" Jimmy's eyes brightened.

"Not exactly, but that is a surprise I've been saving for you."

Instead of driving into the parking area his dad instead went around the fence toward a hanger.

"Look at that silver bird out there. That's what you're going to ride to California in, son!"

A beautiful airplane sat outside the hangar. It was a small jet.

"You wait here," his father ordered, "while I tell them what to do with the car and get the checkout on the plane."

"Gee, I haven't had time to tell you about myself. I'm a flier. I flew in the war. I'll tell you more about that some time. But your old man is a businessman now, a real businessman. I have another bird just almost like this. We fly people and cargo on what we call chartered runs."

They crossed a great river.

"We're over the Ohio river. If you'll look down—no, not out there, but almost straight down, right under us—you'll see where they're building the great bridge. It will have four-lane traffic and will be painted bright orange.

Jimmy looked down. All he could see were many bulldozers and excavations.

"We're up pretty high now, so you probably can't see too much detail. We're leveling out to cruising now.

"I will tell you something else now. You thought your father was dead, but he isn't. I am here and am taking you home. Your mother is gone, of course, before you ever knew her to remember her. She was a beautiful lady, but she is gone now and there is nothing we can do about that.

"But you still have a mother. I have married again. She cannot wait to see you. She wants to have a strong young man around the house, and lately, every day, she has been asking how soon we could get the papers straightened out so that we could get you out of the hands of the state and prove I was your real father. I know you'll love her very much, just as I love her."

The stacattoed stimuli of the morning had come so suddenly and in such great volume that by now Jimmy's mind had become almost numb, and he scarcely knew or realized all that was happening. Still, for the first time since he remembered, he had a new feeling.

His dad took his hands off the wheel-like control.

"Now, you are going to fly this bird for a while. No, don't be nervous. Just put your hands on this stick."

Jimmy, at first fearfully, then ecstatically, took hold of the control. He handled it gently, fearing to move it.

"Now, very carefully, and not too much, give it a wee little push to your right. That's a good man now. Hey! You're going to make a good pilot as well as a good car driver!"

A smile came over Jimmy's face, then a joyous feeling over his entire

body.

"Pilot to co-pilot!" he exclaimed; "Viet Cong at 12 o'clock! Giving them ten rounds of bullets! Ack! Ack! Ack!"

But he held perilously to the wheel, being careful not to move it.

"Hey, I heard from your foster parents that you saw the 'Mothman'. You weren't frightened of him, were you?"

"Naw!"

His dad smiled impishly, and Jimmy knew he was ready to tell him a joke.

"Jimmy, if you'll look, you'll see 'Mothman' down there below. He's flying around and around down there. Here, let me take over and bank the plane so he'll be on your side.

Jimmy looked out the window.

"Do you see him?"

"Yeah, he's really flying fast."

"I guess you will sort of miss him?"

"Naw! Not really!"

"Look. He's circling and banking just like we did. He's taking advantage of the air currents."

Jimmy craned his neck to get a better look at the bird. Then the happy grin came over his face again.

"Oh ugly bird!" he addressed the creature, far, far below; "Goodbye, you great big scary creature."

Then, repeating a term that had been going around the school, he added:

"Sorry about that, Mothman!"

The golden hawk basked and circled in the warm air currents. Sometimes it dropped, at great speed, toward the ground; then, seeing no prey, rose again. To it the sun was bright and the earth exploding in a burst of green. The whine of the jet plane, which had momentarily frightened it, was now gone and far away, and once again it continued lazily in its flight.